

A CYCLE OF NOVELS

IMMORTAL HISTORY

The Year 1932

PYONGYANG, KOREA

1977





**In memory of the 60th birthday of
the respected and beloved leader
Comrade Kim Il Sung**

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The Year 1932

By April 15th Writing Staff
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**Comrade Kim Il Sung, Commander of the
Korean People's Revolutionary Army**

A shot rang out.

His eyes wide open, Chojjae craned his neck and looked towards the main road.

There was another report which echoed through the valley.

"Aren't they the Japs, boys?" he asked.

Three boys who had been playing the tipcat immediately shinned up a white aspen tree that stood in the yard of the tavern. They all looked about nine. Chojjae was up in the top of the tree.

"Chol Nam, they are running up the road," he shouted.

Chojjae came tumbling down, picked up his rubber shoes and darted into an alleyway. The other boys followed.

As one report followed another, bullets whined through the tin roofs, raising dust from the walls.

Big Valley Village with some three hundred houses was thrown into a panic and cries were heard everywhere.

"Help! Help!"

With fists clenched Chojjae ran for his life towards the embankment, but suddenly he stopped, remembering that his father had gone to the field.

He turned the corner at the blacksmith's and as he was running helter-skelter towards the field lane, someone came rushing from the opposite direction and shouted in a hoarse voice: "The Japs are coming for a 'punitive operation'. Run away!"

It was Li Chol Gun, the oldest brother of Chol Nam with whom he had just been playing.

"Chojjae, run to the mountain. To the mountain, I say!"

Pointing to the mountain, Li Chol Gun dived into the village like a bird.

"The Japs are coming that way, too!" Chojjae shouted after him, but he ran on and disappeared around the corner of a house. Chojjae was not sure whether he had heard him or not.

When he was trying to cross the main road dark shapes

suddenly rose up in front of him. They were trucks. Machine guns were spitting fire from the tops of these trucks full of Japanese soldiers. There was a long line of trucks stretching out beyond the slope.

Chojjae changed his mind and tried to find a way out through one of the back streets. He was running along the fence, when he again met Chol Nam's brother; he had an elderly woman in his arms, blood was dripping from her breast. Seeing villagers gathered at every corner, he yelled to them to go up the mountain right away.

These people who had been at a loss what to do, started off immediately along the bank of the river to take refuge in the mountain.

Soon shots were heard from that direction, too.

With his way blocked, Chojjae turned the corner at the shop with the signboard of *Jintan*. He wanted to escape to the rear of the village. One truckload after another of armed Japanese soldiers arrived in the main street, and they got off the vehicles and spread out in groups.

Chojjae dashed across the street in a flash and crawled under the bridge. Clinging to one of the pillars he stared about him, bulging eyes, looking for a way out.

The village was in flames now. A black cloud was rising from where he had played the tipcat with Chol Nam and Chang Sun. The thatched roofs tinder-dry from the spring wind were burning fiercely with a crackling sound.

Soldiers in khaki uniforms with kerosene cans and fire-brands were rushing about the yards of burning houses and the alleys, howling like hungry beasts.

The fire was spreading all over the village.

It was a sight too terrible for Chojjae who was just nine years old. He could not quite understand. They were the first Japanese that he had seen. His sister, Chol Nam's brother and Mr. Min of the Children's Corps had always told him that the Japanese were the worst devils in the world. But why had they suddenly come to set fire to the village and slaughtered people?

Covering his cheeks with his hands Chojjae stared vacantly at the burning village. When his wide-opened eyes rested on the centre of the village, he thought of his sister, maybe still at home. He crept out from under the bridge to get into the village and find her. But he winced and fell back a few steps.

Mounted officers were approaching the bridge. Chojjae recoiled and lay flat by the waterside. Whenever there was the clatter of hoofs above, dirt dropped down the back of his neck. Only after the cavalry had crossed the bridge, rattling their sabres, did he crawl up stealthily from the waterside to the main street.

When he had almost reached the grounds of the community school, he again fell flat in a hollow.

Many people were being marched out of the village. There were scores of them.

Oh, there's Chol Nam, he thought.

His face white with horror, Chol Nam was wailing, clinging to his mother's arm.

"Mamma, don't go, Mamma!"

A stocky Japanese private with a protruding tooth kicked him savagely.

"Oh!" cried Chojjae and trembled, his fists hard against his chest, his mouth open. Chol Nam fell on the ground but rose and followed his mother, clutching at her skirt.

He wanted to shout to him, "Chol Nam, hit the Jap with stones." But he could not because his throat was choked.

In the school grounds, a hook-nosed Japanese asked the captives to stand in single file. Holding his gun, he howled:

"Communists! Step forward!"

The people stood motionless.

"Hurry up and step forward!"

Several Japanese ran up to the crowd and dragged out a dozen or so young villagers. Among them were four or five women.

Chojjae feared lest his sister should be there among them but she was not to be seen.

Guns were fired. People fell here and there.

"You dogs!"

"Ah, you devils!"

"Kill the Japs! Kill them!" Chol Nam's mother shouted shaking her clenched hand at the Japanese.

Then a young man stepped forward and shouted:

"Neighbours! Raise your heads! These Japs are doing this because they are scared. The Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army was founded in Antu County last month. They will overthrow Japanese imperialism and free our people, so the Japs are frightened and behave like this. Let's not be cowed. Their days

are numbered. General Kum Song will liberate our homeland and avenge us."

This was Mr. Min, the leader of the Children's Corps of this village. He shouted himself hoarse, brandishing his fists, when two shots rang out and he clutched his breast with his hands and collapsed slowly. He did not rise again.

The people shouted in unison.

"Destroy the Japanese imperialists!"

"Strike the enemies!"

An officer rode over and dismounted. He jumped down from the horse. He was wearing a sabre. His reddish brown boots creaked as he walked towards the people. He paused in front of them. He unfastened his sabre and leaned forward on it. With a menacing frown, he glared around him.

He looked very unhappy because the Koreans were stubbornly showing resistance while his soldiers appeared so helpless and slow to react. His pale thin lips quivered momentarily before he angrily shouted out, "Kill'em all!"

His own voice made him so nervous that his shoulders shook spasmodically and he gazed around.

The frightened soldiers scattered in all directions like whipped pigs.

Chojjae stared at the Japanese officer without a blink.

"Burn them all!"

Now, the whole village was submerged in a sea of fire. A great flame flared up from the community school on the outskirts of the village.

Chojjae lay flat in a ditch and looked at the burning school building, rubbing his smoke-filled eyes.

Throughout the spring Chol Nam's brother, Mr. Min and the rest of the villagers had worked hard to build the school. Chojjae, too, helped them with Chol Nam, bringing wood from the mountain for the rafters and lattices.

Chojjae quivered with his fists clenched as if his body were afire.

There were more reports of gunshots. People fell one after another on the sandy bank of the river. They had fortunately escaped from the village that was enveloped in flames.

"Oh, the butchers! I wish I could kill them, the devils."

The voice of Chol Nam's mother rang out from the crowd of people surrounded by the armed soldiers.

The officer leaning on his long sabre pointed at her and two privates rushed at her and tried to drag her out.

Chol Nam's mother fought back with her hands. The people standing close to her prevented the Japanese soldiers from grabbing her.

"You dirty dogs! Who are you going to touch? You sons of bitches!"

She struck one of the soldiers on the chest.

Now four or five soldiers pounced on her. As the people again resisted them the attackers opened fire. Two of the villagers fell.

She cried: "Let go. Let me go. You young folks mustn't be killed because of me."

She pushed her way through the crowd and walked forward with a determined look.

Chol Nam was nowhere to be seen.

"Where's your son?" asked a bespectacled man in a vest, coming forward with his chin thrust forward. A Japanese agent, no doubt.

"I don't know."

"He's a Communist, isn't he?"

She gave him a long, cold stare, biting her bloodstained lips.

"You too must die because you gave birth to a Communist." Her anger burst out at these words.

"I gave birth to a Communist and am going to be killed, but I didn't give birth to a dog like you."

The officer yelled something to his men standing behind, and two soldiers leapt at her, twisted her arms and dragged her towards one of the burning houses.

"Let go, you bastards! What did I do to you? You devils."

Young villagers retrieved her from the hands of the Japanese.

At that moment Chol Nam darted forward from among the crowd.

"Mamma!" he cried.

Chojjae who had been watching the scene, lying on the ground, nearly shouted out "Chol Nam!"

Chol Nam grabbed and clung to his mother's hand, when a report of a gunshot rang out.

Chol Nam writhed on the ground clutching his chest.

Chojjae cried out and covered his eyes.

A few seconds later piercing shrieks rent the air and there was a clatter of guns. When he opened his eyes, Chojjae saw the villagers running forward, wielding their fists, and the Japanese indiscriminately firing at them.

Chol Nam's mother appeared in front of them, carrying her son in her arms.

"Neighbours, don't worry about me. You must live and avenge us. Avenge my son, Chol Nam."

Then she went into the fire carrying his son, pushed on from behind by the Japanese.

"Chol Nam, Chol Nam!" cried Chojjae in spite of himself and jumped to his feet. At this moment the school building crumbled, shooting a flame up into the air.

Chojjae stood dazed but then he thought he must inform somebody about this and bring him here. He looked round and made for the rear of the village along the ditch.

The Japanese herded the captives in front of Gum Suk's house too. He winced and stared at the crowd with frightened eyes. He saw Jong Ok his sister among them.

In spite of himself, he called out to his sister. He wanted to run to her, but clung to the corner of the wall instead.

Somebody grabbed him by the back of the nape. He was lifted up in the air and flung to the ground.

"Trying to run away, you little brute?"

A Japanese with a long protruding tooth kicked him on the head, the chest and the legs with his heavy boots.

Chojjae writhed in pain holding his belly, his face twitching.

Presently he came to his senses. The Japanese was firing a machine gun frantically from an oxcart in the yard. The captives had been marched off to the edge of the field and people were falling over every time there was a chattering of machine gun fire. The bodies kept piling up in the hollow beyond the edge of the field.

Then Chojjae's sister appeared on the edge, hand in hand with Gum Suk who lived next door. Chojjae thought she saw him but apparently pretended not to.

"Sister!"

Chojjae shouted and stamped his feet.

She did not answer, however; she stood still, just looking at the distant mountains.

The short and fat machine gunner with a dark complexion pulled the trigger. At the clatter of the gun, she fell down,

hugging Gum Suk in her arms. As the muzzle of the gun spat fire, villager after villager fell over the dyke.

"Sister! Sister!"

The moment he yelled, he himself fell forward. He thought he had been pushed by someone or shot because he heard the gun.

Sometime later, while lying flat on the ground, he heard the gruff voices of the Japanese.

But he kept his eyes closed for a long while, before slowly opening them a fraction.

He could see a pair of shiny boots and a sabre which dangled about the boots. He must be the one Chojjae had seen in the school grounds.

Shutting his eyes tight Chojjae lay on his side and held his breathing to appear as if dead.

When the owner of the sabre had uttered a word or two, the sound of footsteps faded away.

Several Japanese were turning the bodies over one by one, with their bayonets to see if they were dead or not. When they found anyone still alive, they would shoot him again or stab his chest with their bayonets.

Chojjae felt someone's hand on his waist. His head was touching the toe of Chang Sun's father. Gum Suk's mother was also lying by his side.

Now Chojjae guessed Chang Sun's father had kicked him or Gum Suk's mother had clutched him as they fell.

Some minutes later Chojjae again opened his eyes a fraction to see what was going on.

Two Japanese were approaching him. They would be turning over Chang Sun's father and then Chojjae himself after a few more people. They stabbed or dragged out the bodies lying on the ground. After a while, one of them said:

"Look here. This will take hours and we won't be able to finish our job tonight. Let's just kick them. How about it?"

"Yes, they are dead all right...."

"How about just checking them roughly?"

"What if Araki raises hell about this?"

"What's wrong with Col. Araki? You think he has seen the so-called Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army with his own eyes? Oh, hell. Let's have a smoke."

They sat down on a mortar, lit their cigarettes and re-

sumed their conversation. One of them was a shortish fellow and the other wore spectacles.

"I guess he has received information. From the way he talks, the Greater Empire of Japan seems to be at stake."

"I was told they are armed Communists."

"Sure. But they say the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army which has declared war against the Greater Empire of Japan is an unusual army."

"The colonel is fond of the word 'unusual'. He says: 'You are on an unusual mission.' 'We are going to wipe out some unusual Koreans.' 'You'll have an unusual reward after this operation.'"

"At any rate, once we are confronted by the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army of Korea, Japan's advance on the continent would be hampered."

"That's not the whole reason. Otherwise, they wouldn't be jumping around like excited malaria patients."

"Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army—it sounds pretty nasty."

"You know a terrorist threw a bomb at General Shirakawa in Shanghai sometime ago? They say he is a Korean. The Koreans are terrible. They always give us a scare."

"Oh, don't tell me. The guerrillas are the most terrible of all."

"I'm sure the colonel has had a couple of glasses of wine by now."

"Hum, he has a nice habit."

"Well, shall we start now?"

They stamped out cigarette butts and spat.

Chang Sun's father was dragged out first by the bespectacled man.

The footsteps which had receded now came back to Chojjae, raising a breath of wind across his face. He lay flat in breathless suspense.

"I wonder if this tiny tot was really a communist agent."

"There is no point in raising that, is there?"

Chojjae was kicked twice in the hip and his body was held up in the air by sturdy hands. Then he was thrown some distance. He felt as if his nose was broken but he endured the pain. Then Gum Suk's mother was dragged out. Her leg fell on Chojjae's waist.

Dusk came and the yard fell into silence.

An engine started up somewhere over towards the tavern

and then there was a great clatter of horse carts being pulled out of the alleys.

Then the Japanese seemed to be mustering somewhere, yelling something Chojjae could not catch.

Chojjae did not know whether he was dead or alive. This might just be the way one felt when one was shot, he thought. He was afraid he might stop breathing soon and die. In the quiet, he tried to flex his fingers, now under his belly. They worked all right. Then he wiggled his toes. Nothing was wrong with them. He turned his neck and he raised his body a little way to look around.

Not a Japanese was in sight.

He rose to his feet immediately and crawled down to the edge of the field. He tried hard to find his sister but she was not among the heap of bodies.

Chojjae crossed the stream and darted up the hill where the villagers had sought refuge. Suddenly someone called "Chojjae!" from a mound to the left. He looked around and there was his sister. She dashed down to him, along the bushes.

"Sister!"

The brother and sister embraced each other at the entrance to the valley.

"Chojjae! You are alive!" said she, fondly stroking his back. She did this again and again. Chojjae buried his face in her bosom and for the first time since it all began, he burst into tears.

"Sister, Chol Nam is dead. His mother, too. They burned them." He said between his sobs.

"I saw it." She said very quietly, which surprised him. But her hands which had been stroking his back stopped still.

Having cried his heart out, Chojjae looked up at her face. It was strange to find her so calm. She turned a hostile gaze at the street down which the Japanese raiders had disappeared. This filled him with tension.

He pulled at her clothes like a little child and said, "Sister, I thought you had been shot."

"I was wounded slightly in the arm. But the wound has been bandaged now. I cried so bitterly because I thought you had been killed...."

She spoke briskly as she always did, and tenderly wiped his dirt-smeared face and bloodstained hands. Then she led

him by the hand to where the villagers had flocked. The sun was setting slowly behind the mountains. A haze of blue smoke hung heavily over the scorched village and an acrid smell floated in the air.

A long formation of the Japanese soldiers was withdrawing to the walled town.

The buzzing trucks, horse carts and soldiers carrying heavy loads on their shoulders looked like one long tattered mop cloth. Wild howls were heard here and there.

The soldiers were squabbling over their loot—clothes and fabrics and other valuables they had taken from the Korean houses. In spite of their superiors' angry remonstrations, they laughed and chattered, goggled their protruding eyes as they walked, showing their prominent teeth, so typical of the Japanese.

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The summit commanded view for miles around. Undulating mountains stretched into distance like waves. The hills and fields were in the thick of spring. Larch leaves had turned light green and there was the sound of the water trickling down the valley.

Wiping the perspiration off his forehead, Comrade Kum Song in a grey worker's tunic said in a roaring voice: "Well, do you think we can cross the Kaduk-ryong Pass before dusk?"

Chon Gwang Sik who had been walking behind caught him up quickly and answered. "We still have to cover 30 *ri* to get to the foot of the Kaduk-ryong Pass."

"Another 30 *ri* to go? Then we must hurry."

Comrade Kum Song looked up and measured the height of the sun from the horizon.

"Did you tell Comrade Kwon Man Song to ask Comrade Li Hyok to join us?"

"Yes, I did."

"Then Comrade Kwon may be a bit late."

"Before his departure, he said he would definitely make it before the agreed date."

"He has never broken his promise, has he?"

Comrade Kum Song smiled and looked down the path he was going to take.

Chon Gwang Sik stepped aside for him to pass.

Comrade Kum Song started descending.

The orderly walked some steps ahead. Comrade Kum Song's bodyguard, Chon Gwang Sik was supposed to walk some distance behind him but he had to stay close because he often asked him about the situation in this part of the country.

Chon Gwang Sik was a man of average stature. He was tough and sturdy. His high forehead was hidden under a worn-out cap, and only his round nose was conspicuous. He looked rather like a peasant, his face sunburnt and glistening. He had been guarding his Commander for more than twenty days on his inspection tour of the central sector on the Tuman-gang River.

On the 25th last, that is, twenty days previously, the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army had been founded at Antu.

On founding the guerrilla army, Comrade Kum Song sent political workers to rural areas and he himself went to the Yenhua area halfway down the Tuman-gang River. Then he made a trip along the river to visit some parts of the Wangching area via Holung and Yenchu. Now he was on his way back to Liangkang in Antu County.

The revolutionary situation was changing rapidly. The Japanese imperialists were carrying out most savage "punitive operations" along the Tuman-gang River.

Throughout his journey across burning fields, valleys and mountains, Comrade Kum Song had been deeply wrapped in thought, and had got little sleep at nights. And three days ago he had given an order to send messengers to different places so as to get the political workers and inspectors to come to Liangkang.

Chon Gwang Sik's sixth sense told him that Comrade Kum Song had at last conceived an idea to tide over the present crisis. Chon Gwang Sik had been working with Comrade Kum Song since Kirin. He had heaved a sigh of relief and, as instructed, had dispatched hurried messengers. Today Comrade Kum Song had set out at dawn and had already covered 70 *ri*. All the way here he had asked him question after question about local conditions and dropped in at two places to inquire into the situation there.

They made their way in silence for a while. Then Comrade

Kum Song said abruptly over his shoulder, "I wonder if Comrade Li Chol Gun of Big Valley has received the message."

"He should have. Maybe yesterday if nothing went wrong...."

"I'm very worried about his place. I think the main troops of the enemy's 'Chientao Expeditionary Force' will be concentrated on the Wangching and Yenchu areas."

Chon Gwang Sik heard his grim tone of voice and was at a loss what to say. He hesitated a moment and said, "I'm sure he'll tide over the situation anyhow."

Comrade Kum Song did not say anything further and resumed his descent.

There was a clearing at the end of the valley. As they came round a mountain bend, they sighted a rather big river.

"Who are those people down there?"

Comrade Kum Song stopped and shaded his eyes with his hand.

There was a crowd of people on the bank of the river.

Chon Gwang Sik, too, had seen them as he turned the bend but he had not bothered about because he thought they were waiting for a ferry to cross the river.

Comrade Kum Song went pale. His face, which had been ruddy from the long walk, looked worried.

Chon Gwang Sik and the orderly ran towards the bank.

As soon as he came to the bank Comrade Kum Song realized what had happened, and walked quickly to the dyke overgrown with purple willows.

He was on an elevation where a solitary willow was standing, when Chon Gwang Sik came running up. He reported that the people who were on the bank of the river were the victims of a "punitive operation" which had been carried out a few days ago.

"You mean they were attacked by the 'punitive force'?"

"Yes, they were."

"I see. So they are the survivors, eh?"

He had expected that sooner or later he would witness this sort of scene, yet faced with a reality, he could not but feel agitated.

There were scores of refugees scattered on either side of the river. Most of them were old people, women and children.

The sun was so hot—it was the time of day when travellers are inclined to take a rest.

The wounded squatted in the sun, examining their wounds and women and children were cooking some food, bringing water from the river with calabashes. Bluish clouds of smoke were rising from the fires here and there.

It was too late for dinner but too early for supper.

When Chon Gwang Sik asked them questions, some of the refugees looked quizzically at the inquirer but soon they paid no further heed.

Comrade Kum Song hurried down to the bank.

He noticed three toddlers in the grass, plucking flowers. They looked three or four years old. A plump boy was stretching out his hand to pick a dandelion. His sleeves were burnt and there were a couple of holes on each. Crawling opposite him was a short-haired girl. She had only one rubber shoe and her left arm was bandaged. By her side a little boy was seated on the ground. His hair was singed.

A cloud passed over Comrade Kum Song's face as he stopped to look at these children.

They picked up dandelions from their laps and smiled cheerfully at the stranger.

A few paces down the slope towards the water's edge, a middle-aged woman squatted beside a blackened cooking utensil. She was blowing at the fire. She was covered with white ashes. When she raised her head, tears rolled down her cheeks from her reddened eyes.

Some people had settled in hollows to protect themselves from the wind.

A girl of about 15 with a bandaged arm was stitching up a tear in the jacket sleeve of a little girl who seemed to be her sister. She worked awkwardly because the latter was in her jacket. Her face became flushed when the stranger looked at her.

By her side a lanky, beetle-headed boy with round eyes squatted on his haunches. He was shaving away at something with a knife. Beads of sweat were breaking out on his nose.

"What are you making, my boy?"

Comrade Kum Song asked in a soft voice. He bent forward and patted him on the head.

He looked up and answered briskly.

"I'm making a catapult."

"Making a catapult? Oh, that's wonderful." Comrade

Kum Song sat down on the grass beside him. "What are you going to do with it?"

"I'll hit the Japs."

"Hit the Japs? Let me have a look."

He, too, had made catapults as a boy. On the banks of the Sunhwa-gang River there used to be rows of willows, and he could find plenty of good forked branches for catapults. Once he used his catapult to sling stones at the Japanese police who had come to search his house.

"You are going to hit the Japs, eh?"

"I am. They killed my father and mother...."

His round lips quivered slightly as he said it.

"You are a good boy. Make a good catapult and shoot our enemies. By the way, who is this girl?"

"She is Gum Suk. Her parents were killed also."

"And who is this boy?" he asked, pointing to a six- or seven-year-old.

"He's an orphan, too."

"What's your name?"

"Chojjae. Sister, you said I had another name besides Chojjae, didn't you?"

The girl looked up from her sewing for a moment. She was about to tell her brother something but, instead, lowered her head slowly.

As soon as Chojjae's sister had mended the tear, and bitten off the thread with her teeth, Gum Suk stood up and ran down towards Chojjae.

Comrade Kum Song noticed that several children were gathered in a group. He asked:

"Chojjae, is your sister taking care of all these boys and girls?"

"Yes, she is."

"Is she in the Children's Corps?"

"My sister is a platoon leader of the Children's Corps."

Chojjae answered proudly, opening wide his eyes under their thick eyelashes and throwing a glance at her.

"I see. Which village are you from? When did they raid you?"

Comrade Kum Song asked Jong Ok, Chojjae's sister.

She hesitated a little, lowering her eyes and biting her lip, before she replied in a slightly unsteady voice.

"We are from Big Valley Village in Wangching."

"What?! Big Valley?"

Comrade Kum Song was stunned and rose to his feet.

"Yes, they raided us the day before yesterday..."

She could not finish what she was going to say. Tears filled her eyes and again she hung her head.

"Oh, did they?..." said Comrade Kum Song in a grave tone, and lifted his head and gazed into the sky. Then he again turned to Jong Ok. He urged her to tell him the details.

Jong Ok was fifteen. With a round face and long eye-lashes, she still had something of the child about her. Jong Ok spoke in a broken voice. She kept biting her lip to control the tears, and her shoulders quivered a little. She told briefly what she had witnessed: How the young people had been shot in the yard and how children were burnt to death.

Her story broke his heart. The hand with which he had been stroking Gum Suk's hair trembled involuntarily.

While Jong Ok continued her story, wiping away the tears with the back of her hand, a middle-aged man came up to them. He had been sitting on the grass nearby, sucking at his pipe. He was So Guk Bo, a peasant from Big Valley.

As Jong Ok burst into sobs and covered her face with her hands, So Guk Bo clutched his chest and resumed the horrid story for her.

He had been undergoing terrible agony because he had been unable to find an outlet for his burning rage.

He was a quick-tempered man with a powerful voice. With spontaneous gestures, he described the "punitive operation" graphically.

At times he was so infuriated that he struck his own chest, and at times he tore at the grass and gritted his teeth, cursing the Japanese. He said he had also lost his wife and two children.

"Now I realize the truth of the old saying: 'The tears go down but the spoon still goes up.' Oh, God! I wish I could die but here I am, still alive!"

So Guk Bo lamented, hitting at the ground. Comrade Kum Song said quietly: "Calm down. The greater our troubles, the harder we must try to live on. Not because we are afraid to die. Those who remain alive must live to avenge the dead and...."

Comrade Kum Song stopped talking and cast his gaze on the water's edge. For a while he looked at the half-naked children in rags squatting there, and then he went on:

"For the sake of those orphans we must live and fight, come what may."

"You are right there. Li Chol Gun of our village said the same thing. He said General Kum Song has formed a guerrilla army, and he'll take vengeance on the enemy. He asked me to escape with the neighbours and here I am, but...."

"Is Comrade Chol Gun here with you?"

So Guk Bo gave him a dubious look. Jong Ok, who was a little calmer now and had been watching Comrade Kum Song closely, answered:

"Comrade Chol Gun crossed the Mapanshan Mountains with some of the villagers. He asked Uncle Guk Bo and me to take children and the weak old people to Holien, which is not far, and seek protection from the organization there. He said as soon as he settled, he would send a man to fetch us."

"Well, what happened to his family? He has a mother and a little brother...."

Comrade Kum Song was anxious to know, but neither Jong Ok nor Guk Bo could answer his question. He looked around, gripped by a strange premonition. By this time he was surrounded by a group of people who had been nearby. A middle-aged man sat down by So Guk Bo and smoked. He had been near a mound, braiding the hair of a girl who was apparently his daughter. The girl, in a yellow jacket, took a pot with the remains of rice stuck to it to the water's edge as soon as he had finished plaiting her hair.

Chojjae who had been making the catapult got up abruptly and said: "The Japs shot Chol Nam and burnt his mother."

He almost shouted this, holding on to the waistband of his trousers. Tears poured down his cheeks.

"Is that true?" Comrade Kum Song placed his hand on the boy's shoulder and ran his eyes over So Guk Bo and then Jong Ok. Both simultaneously hung their heads. Chojjae nodded, wiping away his tears with his fists.

"That's true. All they've said is a fact. It is hard to believe. But it really happened." It was the middle-aged man who had been braiding the girl's hair by the mound, and he spoke in bitter anger.

Comrade Kum Song undid the buttons on his tunic and turned to him.

"Excuse me. An Dong Hak is my name." The man said. "It really is an outrage. Innocent people were massacred in

broad daylight. I've never seen anything like it. I'm enraged. I'm not from Big Valley. I was staying at the inn there on my way to Tunhua. That girl is my daughter. I was staying at the inn with her, and I heard gunshots, so I ran out into the street and saw the street turn into a sea of blood. Bodies were littered in the streets and lanes and children were burnt alive in the fire. Oh, my God! Is Korea going to be destroyed this way?"

An Dong Hak's clenched fists and his whole body trembled. He too had had no opportunity to give vents to his anger; he had had no one to tell about the tragic sight he had witnessed.

He had wanted to lay his heart bare to anybody who was willing to listen; he had wanted to cry and give vent to his sentiments for days to any Korean in whom he could rouse sympathy. His grief and anger were too great for him to bear alone.

He had left Seoul two months ago. He had stayed at Big Valley for a few days and met the unexpected disaster. The events had brought him close to the people of Big Valley, and, now, it was hard for him to part with them. He had been with them for the past few days.

With his shrewd insight as an intellectual, An Dong Hak realized that the young man sitting opposite him was not an ordinary wayfarer. He was completely charmed by the magnanimity one could feel about his personality, the keen perception of every frame of mind and shade of feeling, and his passionate and dynamic tone of voice. An Dong Hak felt a strong desire to speak frankly, to open his heart to this young man.

An Dong Hak talked in such a loud, excited voice that surprised even himself.

"Old people and women were thrown in the fire. You know what they called at? They shouted at us to avenge them. Their screams are still ringing in my ears. How could man be so cruel to man? How could even the imperialists act like that? This is a disgrace, this is an insult to humanity. Be that as it may. We can't expect the enemy to be generous and humane. But this? It was horrible, horrible. And there was nothing I could do to the heartrending screams, to my fellow countrymen's terrible last appeal."

An Dong Hak was so infuriated that he clutched his chest and was choked with a hacking cough.

Comrade Kum Song was deeply attentive to this shouting man who was obviously an intellectual. He seemed to have a firm outlook as well as a strong faith and will.

If he had met this man who was a stranger to him, at some other place and time, he would have had a long talk with him in an appropriate manner. But he had no time to spare now.

At this moment the girl in the yellow jacket came up to An Dong Hak, carrying the pot and a bowl. She looked about nine years old.

"Have you washed them up, Sugi?"

"Yes, I have."

The girl showed him the clean dripping bowl. Then she pushed it into the knapsack.

"Father, let's go."

"All right. We are leaving."

An Dong Hak lit his pipe again and looked up at the sun, readjusting the shoulder straps of the knapsack.

Having inspected the riverbank, Comrade Kum Song went over to pussy willows by the dyke.

His feet sank into the sodden earth. The budding green plants lightly touched his ankles.

He was in a gloomy and depressed mood. His hands behind his back were damp with sweat.

The more he thought about what had happened, the more his heart was torn.

The scene on the riverside looked like an epitome of the bleeding homeland trampled underfoot by the enemy.

The little boy with burnt sleeves waving dandelions in his plump hands, the girl with only one rubber shoe on, and the other boy with his hair scorched by fire. And yet they were smiling. Wasn't this simple and innocent smile an angry call on humanity to smite imperialism? Wasn't the cry of Chol Nam's mother, forced into the fire with the body of her child in her arms, also a wrathful call to the whole land to rise up and battle resolutely against imperialism? There were many countries under imperialist occupation now. But no country had ever been trodden down so savagely, by such a vicious enemy.

Comrade Kum Song had lost his own father to the murderous, atrocious Japanese imperialists. His two uncles had been imprisoned by the enemy. He himself had suffered in-

describable ordeals and pains from the enemy's fiendish repression. But he had fought back indefatigably in the teeth of all ordeals and heartrending setbacks. And what he was witnessing now was a scene of the people's suffering. The children of Korea were scorched. Their hair was burnt and bullets had pierced their sleeves. Waving their sleeves, Korea's children were appealing with smiles: "Save us. We are poor Korean children."

Gritting his teeth, Comrade Kum Song paced slowly along the dyke. He felt as if his heart was being stirred now by the pitiful cries of tens of thousands of children. He felt so oppressed. When he raised his head, a white cloud was floating leisurely across the distant horizon. But at the next moment, the cloud became the ash-covered face of the woman blowing at the fire who looked up, her eyes full of tears. Then again, it looked like the man washing a motherless child and, then, the boy making a catapult to kill the Japanese.

He did not try to avert his eyes, for look where he would, he would see the carnage; it was everywhere and there was no escape from it by averting your eyes.

Under a lone aspen tree there was a reddish brown puddle—a rusty bronze colour. How did the water, even, come to look like blood? He glanced around. At this moment the pussy willows drooped in grief and silence, and the water of the river that, earlier, had sounded so refreshing was as red as the rusty bronze puddle.

Everything looked as if bathed in blood. The whole of the homeland was now submerged in a sea of blood. His compatriots' wrath filled heaven and earth. Clouds and puddles had the colour of blood.

The people's tears cried out—the enemy must be crushed to save the nation. Imperialism must be wiped off the face of the earth—this was history's stern judgment.

Again he felt this solemn demand keenly. As if bearing a tormenting flame within his chest, he walked on and on. He waded through a deep puddle. He did not feel his feet getting wet. His glaring eyes seemed to emit fire.

Chon Gwang Sik came over with a message from the orderly.

Comrade Kum Song sat down on a mound, holding Chon Gwang Sik's hand.

"Comrade Chon. Our people are in agony, shedding blood. And our homeland is a sea of blood now."

His words were full of pain and Chon Gwang Sik felt a lump in his throat and dropped his head in silence.

"Our people are shedding blood and perishing. But it will not end this way. Something must happen, Comrade Chon. History will see our people rise up. They will destroy the imperialist aggressors and achieve independence and liberation."

Still gripping Chon Gwang Sik's hand, he continued: "No one will be able to conquer us. When an oppressed people rise up on their own soil soaked in blood, no aggressor will be able to withstand it."

Comrade Kum Song raised his eyes to the serene sky. Chon Gwang Sik who had been listening to his agitated voice, looked too, clenching his hands.

If Comrade Kum Song opened his heart he would talk for days on end. But he remained tongue-tied. And in this silence, his fury was still more keenly felt.

Chon Gwang Sik had been long working under Comrade Kum Song but he had never heard him speak in such a resolute tone of voice as now.

Soon afterwards, he asked Chon Gwang Sik some questions about what he had seen and heard. Then he said calmly: "Comrade Chon. I think we'll have to change our schedule even if our arrival at Liangkang is delayed for a couple of days."

"Yes...." Chon Gwang Sik replied. He looked as perplexed as a duck in a thunderstorm. He could not quite understand what Comrade Kum Song meant.

"Let's take those people to Crayfish Valley. It's not far from here. It would take them two days to get to the place where Comrade Chol Gun asked them to go. I don't think the children can make it. They need warm rooms and new clothes and footwear. I can't leave them like this..."

"I understand, Comrade Commander," said Chon Gwang Sik, deeply moved by the kindhearted thoughtfulness that had not been fully expressed in words.

Comrade Kum Song walked briskly towards the grass where the children were playing. He picked up a boy of about four in his arms.

"Hi, my dearies," he said. "You are coming with me. You are going to be given food and change your clothes. All right?"

The overjoyed kids flocked round and walked down with him.

Chon Gwang Sik stood watching them for a while, with moist eyes, and then set off after them.

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After he had parted with the refugees from Big Valley, An Dong Hak started for Tunhua, carrying his bundle on his back. He was now on a ridgeway leading to the northwest.

He was trudging along his way in low spirits, holding his daughter's hand. He was going to his cousin in Tunhua in order to find some means of livelihood.

In 1925 he had taken part in founding the Korean Communist Party. He had suffered some difficulties but till the day the Party had ceased to exist in 1928 he had felt proud of the revolutionary activities he had carried out with unshakable faith. One night towards the end of December 1928, when the snow was falling silently in large flakes, he received the unexpected information about the Comintern's December Theses. Since then his life had started on a sharp decline; his faith had been shaken beyond retrieve. However, he had never believed that the Korean communist movement had been in such an appalling state. So he stayed on in Seoul for a few years, enduring all hardships with great patience. But as the days went by reality mercilessly tormented this agonized man who had been gravely mistaken.

A man of indefatigable character, An had later decided to go over to Chientao. The decision was a surprise to himself. There in Chientao, he thought he would be able to find some sort of solution since the "movement to rebuild the Party" was said to have been going on there briskly. Somehow, he had managed to raise the money for the journey and left Seoul last February.

Like his political life, his personal life started suffering setbacks. He had to face one unexpected misfortune after another. His wife, who had been suffering from a gastric disorder,

was attacked by hepatitis and died within six months. Until five years ago his father in the country had helped him financially and he had lived reasonably well. Then his father fell into debt and was sued and made bankrupt.

An Dong Hak was 36 but half his hair was already grey. In order to evade police surveillance he wore a shabby coat and rubber shoes to look like an old man in his fifties.

He always smoked a pipe made of an azalea root. Sometimes he asked himself why he must pretend to be still poorer than he was, but he did not really worry about it.

When he reached Chientao he was still more frustrated. He found that the "movement to rebuild the Party" was a folly, it was an indescribably dirty game, quite different from what he had heard.

He went to Namyang through Chongjin and then to the bank of the Haeran-gang River. He began to realize how thoroughly behind the time he had been. He thought it was nobody's fault but his own.

Everything appeared chimerical and void.

At the inn in Big Valley he had laid on his back for days, his head in his hands. Gazing at the ceiling covered with spider webs, he looked back on the past, the days when he had been ambitious and optimistic.

He thought fondly of those university days when he first came into contact with communist ideology, and of those days in Seoul when he was bustling about day and night and of those long and heated discussions when they were trying to found what they called a party.

Now, he was going to his cousin in Tunhua, the last place he had ever thought of visiting.

So, everything had fizzled out like a daydream. The goal was too far away, like the cloud floating over the horizon and, reality was cruel.

"Walk fast, my dear. The sun is setting already." His daughter had stopped and was squatting in the grass. He urged her on, looking at her with pitiful eyes.

"I can't walk. I've sore feet."

"You must bear with it. We are lucky that we were not killed. Get up. Let's cross the ridge, and we'll put up at an inn for the night."

He walked behind his daughter, jerking the bundle higher on his back, though it wasn't heavy and casting his eyes

as messenger, but soon afterwards was able to work independently.

After Comrade Kum Song had proposed the policy of founding the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army at the Mingyuehkou Meeting last November, his capacity for work improved conspicuously. The gist of this policy was: "Let all of us take up arms to crush Japanese imperialism!" He was excited beyond bounds and worked more devotedly than ever before. He had had little chance to learn, and sometimes things did not go as well as he wished. This was his only headache.

A talkative man, he had tried to rid himself of the listlessness which had built up during the whole winter, in a couple of days. Now, having chatted with Han Hung Su through a whole night and day, he felt light-hearted and was in excellent spirits.

Han Hung Su had told him that the Comrade Commander was supposed to have arrived there the day before. And he was afraid his arrival might be delayed for some unavoidable reasons.

With his back against the rock which was bathed by the spring sun, Pak Hung Dok impatiently kept watching the mountain trail.

In the log cabin splendid comrades were gathered now. Most of them were just about 20 but their names were already well known. They were young Communists who had worked with Comrade Kum Song, and under his leadership, since the days of the Down-with-Imperialism Union or at Kirin, Chialun or Wuchiatzu. While in Tunhua Pak Hung Dok had heard about a great theoretician named Chin Il Man who could recite volumes of Marx's or Lenin's propositions, and he had pictured an old man with a Marxian beard. But actually he was a young man of 20 or so. Song Dok Hyong and Kwon Man Song who had visited the communications centre once in a while were also known for their great theoretical knowledge. In addition, there were such veteran underground organizers as Choe Gi Gap and Li Chol Gun. If they were joined by Han Hung Su and Chon Gwang Sik who was to come at any moment with the Comrade Commander, this group would really be formidable. This was the hard core with whom the Comrade Commander had founded the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army. They would certainly play an important role in the implementation of his far-reaching programme.

All of them had worked devotedly under Comrade Kum Song's guidance fighting in the bleak, windy Huatien area, in the streets of Kirin filled with revolutionary cries and across the blizzard-rent wilderness of north and south Manchuria where they had faced death at every step.

Li Hyok and Pak Gi Nam were somewhat different. These two men were almost in their thirties. They had spent long years in prison. Both of their names had been in the press a great deal since the "Chientao Communist Party Case."

Pak Gi Nam had served three years at West Gate Prison in Seoul, and was released last winter. He was an eloquent theoretician. He had seemed to be dejected somewhat in the prison but was still burning with revolutionary ardour. After his release he had shrewdly dodged the shadowing detectives. For three months he had tried clandestinely to get in touch with his organizations, while receiving medical treatment. After some "troubles" his former organizations in the Chientao area had all been dissolved, and many people had changed. Some had disappeared; others had given up their revolutionary activity and still others had capitulated to Japanese imperialism. He had confined himself to an empty room and drunk several bowls of boiled parsley water every day to reduce his swelling. He cursed the degenerates and renegades as "pseudo-Communists", "would-be Marxists", "shams" and "Judas".

But suddenly he had seen a ray of hope.

Through one of his old friends he had happened to meet Li Chol Gun, an underground political worker for the Wangching area, dispatched by Comrade Kum Song. Li Chol Gun was kind to him and cheered him up.

Then he got to know new comrades who were all pure and clean, full of fighting spirit. They belonged to a fresh rising generation free of all the past stains of sectarianism associated with the "Seoul group", "Shanghai group", "Irkutsk group", and so on.

Irresistibly attracted by the new, he had joined the fighting ranks though then not fully recovered.

Rifle in his hand, Pak Hung Dok peeped at the log cabin down below. He said to himself, "They must have been talking about a lot of wonderful things there, meeting after such a long time." Although he could not hear anything however hard he tried, he felt impelled to turn his head towards the cabin again and again in spite of himself.

Contrary to Pak Hung Dok's imaginings the atmosphere in the house was extremely tense.

Arguments went on by the mud wall, on the porch and inside the room with its doors flung open. Everybody was arguing except Li Chol Gun who was seated astride a wooden block, his head hung low. He himself looked like an old tree stump blackened with smoke because he was in a dark blue worker's tunic which had been scorched by fire during the "punitive operation". Sometimes he raised his head. Whenever he did so his eyes were so piercingly sharp that the others hesitated to talk to him. However, everyone else—Choe Gi Gap and Han Hung Su squatting by the mud wall, the theoreticians like Chin Il Man, Kwon Man Song and Song Dok Hyong who kept beating the porch floor with their fists, and those shouting at each other in the room—was arguing over the "punitive operation" at Big Valley, and all of them had Li Chol Gun in mind.

Their arguments, as usual, began with the discussion on those problems which they had hardly been able to solve or on points which had been unclear to them while carrying out their separate missions. Particularly, Chin Il Man and Song Dok Hyong had many things to clarify since they had for a long time conducted their political activities in local areas, far away from headquarters.

They were discussing how the revolutionary forces should counter the Japanese "punitive operations", when Li Chol Gun arrived straight from experiencing a "punitive operation" at Big Valley. This intensified the arguments.

The Japanese "punitive operations" against Big Valley and other places along the Tuman-gang River had been indescribably cruel and full of atrocities and they had been carried out on an unprecedentedly large scale. In the light of enemy movements, it was certain that there would be more and bigger operations of this kind. This fast developing situation caused serious discussions among these people.

They were seeking answers, racking their brains, although

they felt that when the Comrade Commander arrived, he would have a clear-cut solution.

On April 25, in his speech declaring the founding of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army, the Comrade Commander had analysed the first-stage activities carried out in accordance with the policy which had been mapped out at the Mingyuehkou Meeting and had proposed new specific tasks. How should the guerrilla army be developed? How should the guerrilla bases be established and strengthened? What was to be done to solve the question of the anti-Japanese national united front? All these problems had to be solved to cope with the rapid changes in the situation caused by Japanese imperialism.

The enemies' moves then had made it clear that once they spotted the whereabouts of the guerrilla army they would try to shatter it in a single blow using colossal armed forces, and as soon as they suspected that a village was being used as the guerrilla base, they would burn it down.

Some comrades argued that since all these things had been foreseen when the guerrilla army was founded, their forces had to be concentrated for a direct confrontation with the enemy.

Other comrades opposed this argument as too reckless.

Then what was to be done and how? What was the solution, under these circumstances, that would make it possible to beat back the "punitive operations" and protect the people, while, at the same time, strengthen the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army and open up the road to the final victory of the revolution?

"Man made his first revolutionary onslaught when he realized how meaningless it was to endure oppression," said the long-faced, bespectacled Chin Il Man, wielding his fist. "Comrades, just think. A Korean mother was forced into the fire carrying her dead child. She cried out to us to avenge her. If we must endure this, we must endure everything. If we have to continue to stand this and act too cautiously, why did we take up arms at all? It was not for nothing that Engels characterized the Fabians as cautious. Of course, we must watch the developments carefully but it is more important to consider them from a revolutionary viewpoint. Why are you silent, Comrade Li Chol Gun? Speak up!"

Li Chol Gun cast a gloomy look at Chin Il Man who was shouting, his face turning purple. Rage seemed to be on the verge of bursting out from his mouth but he kept cool like a volcano just before it erupts. His full lips stayed closed.

"Just a moment. Let me say a few words," said Pak Gi Nam who had been smoking continuously, holding an ashtray made of a glass-cup insulator brought in by Pak Hung Dok. Half turning towards the porch, he spoke slowly. "I don't know much theory. And a few years in prison have made me still more ignorant. So I hope you'll forgive me if I make an error or a deviation. Comrade Chin Il Man has just given the impression that Comrade Kwon Man Song has asked us to be cautious. But I've never heard him say that. Therefore, we'll be able to reach an agreement easily. Lenin said that the revolution does not spring out of the air ready-made. Since we've clearly foreseen this confrontation, taking action is simply logical; but, in fact, it is impracticable, isn't it? What does the perspective of confrontation mean? And from all you've said, it means armed resistance. If so, I fear it is incorrect to weigh things simply mathematically, calculating the divisions and corps. What matters here is that we have justice on our side, and it is this, and not our numerical strength that will help us to fight the aggressors."

"I'm still against the argument that all the fledgling guerrillas should be concentrated in a frontal confrontation with the enemy," blurted Kwon Man Song, raising his round face. This stunned Pak Gi Nam who had just been defending him.

Then Song Dok Hyong, a massive youth in a tight worker's tunic, rose to his feet leisurely. He had conspicuous cheek bones and a narrow forehead. His eyes shone with passion.

"Comrade Kwon Man Song is not against the frontal confrontation itself. He is against the active counterblow at the Japanese 'punitive operations' which Comrade Chin Il Man and I have proposed. Namely, he is opposed to our viewpoint that the present historical stage in our national-liberation struggle is entirely new, quite different from the last. Then, what is the basis of our argument and what is Comrade Kwon Man Song's? At the Chialun Meeting Comrade Kum Song set forth a new line, a completely original line for the Korean revolution, and founded the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army in accordance with this line. Meanwhile, Japanese imperialism, the main target of the Korean revolution, has become more ferocious in its all-out fascist repression; they are throwing overboard their deceptive phrase 'Cultured Rule'. The 'punitive operations' against Big Valley and other places along the Tuman-gang River are an example of this. Since this is the product of the enemy's policy, the operations will become bigger and still more brutal.

Therefore, we have to make our armed revolutionary counterattack on the bestial enemy who has lost reason. This is one of the major characteristic features of the present time and is a sound basis for our policy. But what is the basis of Comrade Kwon's argument? Fundamentally speaking, it is that the so-called 'punitive operations' aimed to stifle the Korean people were not started today; that we can't say our forces are adequately prepared to wipe out the Japanese imperialists; that in case they attack us...."

"Let me explain the basis of my argument."

Kwon Man Song raised his head. But though he interrupted Song Dok Hyong, he did not speak up right away.

Because Kwon Man Song was silent, Li Chol Gun looked at him and for a second their eyes met, and they knew that both were in agony. Then, as Li Chol Gun averted his eyes, Kwon Man Song began to speak—slowly and with his usual calm: "The guerrilla army came into being to fight Japanese imperialism with arms. I'm sure we'll wipe it out with our guns. But the Comrade Commander defined this armed struggle as guerrilla warfare and founded a guerrilla army, not a regular army. Why? This is the basis of my argument that we have to be cautious. The news of the 'punitive operation' against Big Valley has excited all of us today. But we must not base ourselves on excitement in defining the prospects of the revolution."

"Then on what basis should we define?" shouted Chin Il Man again, his face purple.

"Comrade Kwon Man Song, we all love our homeland and our people and hate our class enemy, so we've taken part in the revolution. If we are not agitated by the people's misfortune and misery, where does our revolutionary fervour come from? As George Sand said, 'struggle or death, bloody struggle or annihilation—we'll be facing this stark question'."

"I can't agree with your views in anyway."

As he made his blunt retort and squatted down, unexpected silence came. The heated argument had stopped suddenly just as a fully drawn bow string is snapped. A cricket chirped in the shadowy field behind the cabin.

Smoke coiled up out of the room.

Han Hung Su rose slowly and started pacing back and forth across the yard. His heavy footsteps sounded in this sudden silence and emphasized the seriousness of the situation. If the question was not so serious, Han Hung Su would already have

expressed his views. He would have gone straight to the heart of the matter and made his usual sound judgment; everybody recognized him as the best prepared cadre both organizationally and theoretically, as one who had worked under the Comrade Commander since the days of the Down-with-Imperialism Union. But he kept his silence, pacing up and down the yard.

Choe Gi Gap who had been sitting across from Han Hung Su got up abruptly. He had not yet spoken to anyone, but he could guess from Han's expression what he had in his mind while listening to the others arguing, and in his heart he did not like it. His impatience had increased as Han Hung Su's footsteps sounded across the yard, breaking the dead silence.

"I have got neither a proposition nor a theory to produce like Comrade Chin. But I've one thing to produce. Here...."

The comrades focussed their eyes on Choe Gi Gap who was almost shouting, his face filled with excitement. He put his hand to his side and pulled his revolver out of the holster.

"What is this, comrades?" He gasped out. "Tell me! What is this?"

The burnished black muzzle glistened in the sun.

Choe Gi Gap put the revolver on the palm of his hand and showed it around.

"Now, tell me, isn't this a gun? What is this for? Look here, man. The Japs are shooting, stabbing and burning our people. Why can't I shoot them with this? Why can't you shoot them with your gun? What kind of theory is this?"

Li Chol Gun sprang up. His clenched fists were shaking. His gentle, big bloodshot eyes dim with tears were burning with wrath.

"Comrade Choe!" Li Chol Gun cried out painfully as if something had been catching him at his throat.

"Just think of how we have tended this revolution...."

"What's that? You idiot!" Choe Gi Gap turned on his heels, holding his revolver tightly in his hand.

"Comrade Choe Gi Gap!" shouted Han Hung Su sharply, standing erect right in the centre of the yard. His eyes were glaring. It was unusual for Han Hung Su to get so excited. He had been always calm and quiet, and his wide forehead had never lost the gleam of reason.

"Let me say a few words. This question is directly related to the destiny of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army born out of our people's bloody struggle. As regards the viewpoint that we

have to be cautious, which Comrade Chin Il Man has refuted sarcastically, quoting from the classics, you must drop this habit. Whatever the classics say, we have to be cautious on this question because it concerns the future of our revolution. We must never depart from the Comrade Commander's ideological standpoint anywhere anytime; we must remember that it is we, the Korean Communists, who are responsible for the Korean revolution and that we must not deviate from our own position because of momentary excitement or because of someone else's propositions."

After a brief pause he resumed in a very calm tone of voice: "Comrade Chol Gun has asked me not to tell you, but I'm now telling it to you frankly: It was his own mother who was forced into the fire with her dead son in her arms during the 'punitive operation' against Big Valley."

Han Hung Su's declaration was a bolt from the blue.

The atmosphere changed completely.

Li Chol Gun looked reproachfully at Han Hung Su before sitting down on the block of wood, hanging his head. He seemed to be shouting from the heart to fight a battle of vengeance right away. But he was stubbornly keeping silent, clutching his bruised chest.

Chin Il Man approached Li Chol Gun with faltering steps and touched his hands and covered them with his. He raised his tearful eyes at Han Hung Su who was standing against the mud wall.

"Comrade Company Commander, I was too rash. I'll correct this. But I still believe that there is no other alternative than a general counterattack."

So the polemics which had been going on almost the whole day was interrupted without any definite decisions being reached.

One by one the men lit cigarettes and went to the potato field to get some fresh air.

The year was 1932.

The young Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army was enveloped by a fierce storm as soon as it had set sail. Which course should it take to break through?

With a heavy heart Han Hung Su stood gazing at the backs of his comrades who were silently stalking up and down the yard.

2

Leaning against the tree stump, Li Hyok watched what was going on in the yard of the log cabin.

Li Chol Gun had taken off his jacket and was chopping firewood in front of the kitchen. Whenever the axe went down with a flash, a piece of wood would be split in two.

Pak Hung Dok, the generous "Host of the Log Cabin", was going busily in and out of the kitchen. Choe Gi Gap, in army uniform, came through the thicket, up the path from the valley opposite the yard. He carried a yoke on his shoulders, and his husky body dwarfed the water pails, which hung on the ends like toy buckets.

Li Hyok was a tall man with a long neck and hardened fingers. Anyone would take him for a peasant. He looked shabby at first glance, but his eyes were alight with intelligence, and his slightly pouting lips and short chin spoke of simplicity and determination.

Li Hyok had been released from Seoul West Gate Prison only last autumn.

Born and bred in a valley 30 *ri* from Cholwon, he had worked his way through middle school in Seoul and Pyongyang before he went to Chientao where he joined in the communist movement, but was soon arrested.

Utterly emaciated, he had come straight back to Chientao, without even going to his home village. Having successfully dodged police spies who had tailed after him for months, he had roamed Kirin, Harbin and Mukden under an assumed name. He would not have troubled to do so, if he wanted to get in touch with his former organizations. But he had resolved to break with his past completely, and tried hard to make contact with the people involved in the fight to stop Japan's projected Kirin-Hoeryong railway line.

He had heard about this fight in prison, and about the boycott of Japanese goods in 1928.

Four months later he met a member of the Young Communist League at Chiaoho, through whom he got to know Kwon Man Song, and here he was. Everything was new and dear to him. To other eyes all that was going on in the yard might well look like the humdrum chores of daily life, but even the chores had a heightened quality for him. "It is good. It is all good. All these comrades are young, dynamic and dependable." He did have his own views on the present situation, on what they were discussing, but he did not want to get involved in their argument. For he was fascinated by their healthy enthusiasm, by the revolutionary atmosphere, the fine outlook of this group of people, rather than by the discussion.

During the heated argument none of them had shown a trace of egoism; all were true to Comrade Kum Song's revolutionary policy, each was burning with love for his country, determined to save the nation.

Li Hyok had not yet met Comrade Kum Song, but from all that he had seen today, he could picture the lofty personality, the man who had trained this wonderful generation of true young Communists, and he was more anxious to meet him.

"Oh, you are here."

The voice aroused Li Hyok from his meditation. Han Hung Su stood in front of him, smiling. Li Hyok instantly rose to his feet.

"You must be very tired of sitting here all day after your long journey. Why don't you go in and have a rest?"

"No, I'm not tired. I'm feeling stronger and stronger."

The two men sat side by side by the tree stump.

"How is your health? You still look pale...." Han Hung Su asked Li Hyok, concerned.

"Oh, I'm quite all right. Here, among the comrades, I'm full of vigour—I feel as if I'm getting younger."

They laughed together. Then Han Hung Su said:

"Comrade Kum Song is worried about your health. He sent me a message not to assign you any task until you feel up to it. He said that you needn't be called here to this meeting, though he is very anxious to meet you soon."

"So I was told. And I can't tell you how grateful I am for his thoughtfulness...."

Pak Hung Dok, the "Host of the Log Cabin", came up to them with a springy gait. His brown peasant's face and his thick lips always made a friendly impression.

The two men stopped talking and looked up at him.

"Excuse me for interrupting, Comrade Company Commander, but I wanted to ask you something...."

Pak Hung Dok hesitated, looking at Li Hyok out of the corner of his eye.

"What is it?" he said.

"Well, is it true that the Comrade Commander likes noodles?"

"Why on earth do you ask me that now?" Han Hung Su was taken aback by this unexpected question.

"Well, a comrade who was staying a while ago told me, and I thought when he comes here this evening, I'd better cook some noodles...."

"Do you mean to say you've got some starch then?"

"Not starch, but I've got some buckwheat flour."

"Buckwheat flour? That's marvellous. Where did you get it?"

"Well...er, well, I've got some." Pak Hung Dok faltered.

"That's wonderful. He loves noodles, and we were worrying about what we could give him to eat. That is lucky!" Though he was always inclined to be on the serious side, Han Hung Su was as delighted as a child.

"He really likes noodles? Then I'd better get on with making some."

And Pak Hung Dok shot off towards the cabin.

He had planted and harvested some buckwheat the year before and had treasured it like gold dust; he had been sure that one day the Comrade Commander would come here.

"He's a good comrade."

"Yes, they are all good comrades."

The two men expressed their own feelings this way, as they watched Pak Hung Dok carry an armful of firewood into the kitchen.

"Who's that? Isn't he the Comrade Commander's orderly?"

A uniformed man with a gun at his shoulder came running up the path from the valley. Han Hung Su jumped to his feet and hurried down the hill.

"Comrade Company Commander, the Comrade Commander has arrived," the young orderly reported to Han Hung Su in a brisk tone, and everybody in the yard flocked round.

Comrade Kum Song came walking up the path. Han Hung Su spotted Chon Gwang Sik behind him. All the people hurried

forward, though Li Hyok and Pak Gi Nam followed at a slight distance.

"Ah, you all got here!"

Comrade Kum Song approached, with a big smile and open arms as if to embrace his comrades.

He shook hands with Chin Il Man, Kwon Man Song, Song Dok Hyong, Choe Gi Gap and Han Hung Su, asking each a question or two—how he had managed in these hard times, how the comrades in his area were getting along, whether his parents were all right.

His look and every word he spoke to his comrades brought them a warm glow, the feeling that he understood all the hardships they had faced.

Clasping Li Chol Gun's hand, Comrade Kum Song stood speechless for a moment. A shadow passed across his bright, high forehead. And when Comrade Kum Song put his hand on his shoulder, Li Chol Gun felt the tears rising behind his eyes.

Li Chol Gun had a powerful urge to bury his face on the Comrade Commander's broad shoulder but he had to restrain himself. Before he came here he had made up his mind that he must not tell of his personal tragedy, must not burden the Comrade Commander.

After a few moments of hesitation, Comrade Kum Song said: "Cheer up...."

Li Chol Gun turned away, for he could control his tears no longer. And yet he was afraid that Comrade Kum Song might have known. No, that was impossible. Chol Gun hoped that he had had the whole "punitive operation" in Big Valley in mind.

Now Han Hung Su introduced Li Hyok and Pak Gi Nam.

"Ah, both of you have come. I'm glad to meet you." Comrade Kum Song came and shook hands with both, asked after their health, their time in prison, what hardships they had had there, if they had had good medical care since and so on. Both men were so deeply touched that they became almost incoherent.

Then everybody followed him into the cabin.

"You've built a wonderful communications centre here. Well located, too. Comrade Pak Hung Dok is in charge of the place, isn't he?" Looking round the clean cottage, Comrade Kum Song had said this to no one in particular. "Yes, he is." Han Hung Su replied.

Just then the kitchen door flung open, and a man in a white apron emerged out of a white cloud of steam, carrying a large

tureen. He stood riveted at the sight of a stranger, his eyes staring in astonishment.

"This is him, now," Han Hung Su said, a trifle taken aback.

"Is it, indeed? You must be working very hard, Comrade Pak."

Comrade Kum Song was quite informal in greeting Pak Hung Dok.

Confused, now that he knew for certain who it was, Pak Hung Dok hurriedly straightened out his rolled up sleeves and tried to wipe his wet hands with his apron, when Comrade Kum Song grasped his hand.

"How often I tried to come here! And now at last I've made it! All the comrades that have been here sing your praises, talk about your friendly service. Ha, ha, ha...."

"Well, I...er...in fact...."

Normally fluent, Pak Hung Dok muttered falteringly, and he only recovered his composure when Comrade Kum Song inquired him about his family in Tunhua. Then it suddenly occurred to him that he should usher the Comrade Commander into the room.

"Please, do come inside, though I'm afraid it's untidy."

"It's light and cosy," said the Comrade Commander, on the porch.

A campfire had been lit up in a corner of the yard.

A dozen or so comrades squatted in a circle with Comrade Kum Song. The night was far advanced.

"It would have been a good idea for us to get a full night's sleep tonight. But I'm afraid we can't—our enemies are running wild, and they're by no means weak, so this is how we'll have to be all our lives. Don't you agree, Comrade Li Hyok?"

He looked round, seeking Li Hyok's agreement.

"Yes, you are right," said Li Hyok, without hesitation. His simplicity and open-mindedness encouraged Li Hyok.

"Well, then, let me know how matters stand now in your areas."

So saying, Comrade Kum Song looked at Li Chol Gun and Chin Il Man, sitting on his right.

From the tense faces of the other comrades, Li Hyok could see that Comrade Kum Song's remark spelled the beginning of an important meeting.

At this meeting they would be hearing his conclusion on urgent and serious problems concerning the revolution.

Kwon Man Song made the first report, and he was followed by Chin Il Man, Song Dok Hyong, Li Chol Gun and several others.

Occasionally Comrade Kum Song gazed into the campfire, closed his eyes lightly or looked thoughtfully at the speakers. Sometimes, if they did not explain fully or missed out some point, he would ask them for further details.

Li Hyok admired all these men for their superb ability to give a concise and unambiguous description of the complicated situation in their areas.

The more he listened to their reports, the clearer his own grasp became of the whole situation of the Korean revolution; red dots were scattered like stars over a vast expanse along the Tuman-gang River. And a sea of flames was roaring, threatening to swallow the stars, the guerrilla units and the mass organizations—the Young Communist League, the Anti-Imperialist League, the Peasants' Association, the Women's Association, the Children's Corps and revolutionary villages.... The countless young stars caught in the flame seemed to be looking with a burning expectation to this thicket in Antu, this campfire.

"You have finished your reports? I am told that there has been a lot of discussion about the present situation...."

As he heard Comrade Kum Song's deep, sonorous voice, Li Hyok came back to the present and watched him closely.

There were a few moments of silence, and all that was heard was the crackle of the campfire.

"Very well. Let me say a few words. You've all done a great deal of work. Our situation has been difficult as never before, but all of you have worked with courage and devotion, and you have made a giant stride in carrying out the policy mapped out at the Mingyuehkuo Meeting."

Li Hyok was keenly attentive now. The question which, through all their long argument, remained unsolved, would be answered.

Comrade Kum Song resumed slowly:

"I had intended to consult with you at this meeting about some immediate actions. However, in the light of the reports you have just made, and the discussions you had earlier today, and of my own observations of the central sector of the Tuman-gang River area, I think I'll have to say a few words concerning

your analysis and assessment of the present situation and our strategy and tactics."

He looked around as if to see how his comrades would react. His eyes showed a superb intelligence and thoughtfulness, and seemed to see through and grasp everything.

"As you said, the situation is extremely grave and urgent. The Japanese imperialist massacres of the Korean people are becoming still more savage. Our homeland is submerged in a sea of blood. But must we see this only as disadvantageous to us? Must we be frightened with this? Absolutely not. In fact, these frenzied Japanese manoeuvres are not a sign of strength. On the contrary, it proves that they have been driven into a tight corner, are writhing on the deathbed. As you comrades are well aware, two black spots are emerging on this globe at present, which could bring great calamity to all mankind. One is Germany, in the West, the other is Japanese militarism we are confronted with. They are stepping up their militarization at a terrific speed and are stretching their aggressive tentacles across vast areas. These two spots, fanned by the whirlwind of the great panic of capitalism could kindle the flames of war at any moment now. Japan finally showed its true colours, by occupying Manchuria last year. Japan is infiltrating deeper and deeper into Chinese territory every day, every hour.

"What will the Japanese imperialists do with Korea which they have turned into a colony?

"They want Korea as a stable rear, a strong bridgehead for aggression on the continent.

"This is why they have turned Korea into a sea of blood. They have resorted to every conceivable means to cruelly suppress all anti-Japanese forces.

"The 'punitive operation' in Big Valley which you discussed is an example.

"In these circumstances, it is quite natural that we should take up arms and rise up to save our country and our people and, beyond that, to safeguard the security of all Asia and the world.

"Recently, the Japanese imperialists realized that their foothold was by no means stable and they are trying to wipe out all anti-Japanese armed forces before a further advance on the continent.

"While they keep clamouring about the so-called 'Shanghai Incident' the Japanese imperialists are stepping up their troop movements in Korea. Part of the 19th Infantry Division at Ra-

nam has already crossed the Tuman-gang into Manchuria and other units are concentrated along the river for several hundred *ri*. Meanwhile, the Kwantung Army which has occupied the whole of Manchuria, has kept small forces at certain places and large forces are moving up along the Tuman-gang, making 'punitive' attacks on Chang Hsie-liang's army. Figuratively speaking, the Japanese imperialists, running ahead, dagger in mouth, have been caught in a noose and are trying to wriggle out of it."

In a few short sentences, he had got right to the heart of the whole complicated internal and external situation to the great satisfaction of his men. He tackled it much as a good surgeon uses his scalpel when he neatly cuts out a festering nucleus. Everyone heaved a sigh of relief. All looked with sparkling eyes at his solemn face.

"I don't know exactly what your views were because I wasn't present at your discussion. But I imagine what it turned on was how we should cope with the rapidly changing situation—how to deal with these 'punitive operations' and how to reinforce our revolutionary forces. Am I right, Comrade Song?"

He asked Song Dok Hyong, his eyes flashing like lightning.

"Yes, Comrade Commander," replied Song briskly, rising to his feet.

He nodded with a smile and continued:

"Then I'll say a few words about it."

As he posed the question this way, their looks changed all at once. Chin Il Man, Choe Gi Gap and others who had insisted on frontal attack on the Japanese "punitive operations" seemed invigorated.

"In order to solve this question, you must recall the line we mapped out at the Chialun Meeting, which I'm sure you know very well, and the policy set out at the Mingyuehkou Meeting, which detailed that line. Because the problem we now face can be tackled along these lines. The Chialun Meeting proposed what you call the four major strategic policies. First of all we defined the nature of our revolution: we are now in the stage of anti-imperialist, anti-feudal democratic revolution. Then we decided at that time that to carry through this revolution, we must fight the Japanese with a standing, organized armed force. And we agreed unanimously that we need an anti-Japanese national united front based on the worker-peasant alliance and that a new type of Marxist-Leninist party be founded in the

future, after adequate organizational and ideological preparations. Later, at the Mingyuehku Meeting, we applied this policy in the light of the changed situation and decided to organize an Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army immediately, and it was founded on April 25. Today I would like to stress among other things how to strengthen and develop our armed struggle against the Japanese from now on. The basic policy was laid down at the Mingyuehku Meeting. After all, this is the key to the problem of whether we should go for a 'frontal military confrontation' or choose some other approach. The anti-Japanese armed struggle we have just begun has its own peculiarities, for which there is no parallel. In other countries, the parties are usually founded first and, in accordance with their revolutionary strategy, they decide their policies: whether to use violent struggle, that is, popular uprising, or win power through a revolutionary war. However, our country has been reduced to a colony, invaded and occupied by Japanese imperialist forces, and as yet we have no Marxist-Leninist party of our own. Therefore, for us, armed struggle is not just a method, it is the all-embracing, fundamental issue, and this determines the whole strategy of the revolution. In short, it is only through this armed struggle that we will have a party, that a patriotic, anti-Japanese united front will come into being, that we can achieve our revolutionary strategic objectives one by one. These are the demands of the actual situation, the needs of our people. It is both necessary and inevitable. So the issue that you raised in your discussions is basic for the whole revolution, an issue that will have a tremendous influence on the whole future of the anti-Japanese armed struggle. Now, as I pointed out, the formation of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army was a great event; it has made a fundamental change in our revolution. Its foundation marks a radical switchover in the history of the Korean people's national-liberation movement. As the days go by, its significance will become even clearer, and will be understood by more and more people. Therefore, as I have said, the Japanese imperialists are making frantic efforts to strangle the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army in its cradle. That is how things stand right now. So shall we frustrate their counterrevolutionary strategy and advance along the revolutionary course that we have set, to ultimate victory, or shall we just sit down and wait? It is a stern question, one that we must answer. So what should we do

right now? We must carry out the policy put forward at the Mingyuehkou Meeting in full. Our slogan remains unchanged: Arms first. Arms second. Arms third! In this spirit we must keep on expanding, reinforcing the guerrilla army. This is where all our efforts must be focussed. And to expand and intensify our guerrilla warfare we must set up a revolutionary base, to be the bulwark, the stronghold of the revolutionary armed forces and the fountainhead of revolution. And we will have to achieve a united anti-imperialist front with the people in the neighbouring country that the Japanese imperialists are invading, to isolate the enemy as far as possible. We must stick firmly to this policy, come what may. Now let's examine the frontal military confrontation advocated by some of the comrades here. As I understand it, it is based on emotion, on the immediate excitement and rage at the enemy's latest atrocities. But it is a reckless idea, and it is simply impractical. Those who insist on frontal confrontation say that they base their argument on the policy decisions at the Chialun and Mingyuehkou Meetings, but this can't justify their deviation. For at the Chialun Meeting, the line of armed struggle was proposed, and at the Mingyuehkou Meeting, it was decided to found a guerrilla army for this, and to carry on a revolutionary war by guerrilla warfare. So we must start work on strengthening this guerrilla army. That is essential. This was firm, independent position we proposed, and we can't allow ourselves to deviate from this position because of a temporary change in the situation or because of Japanese imperialist manoeuvres.

"If we give up this work, this policy for 'frontal confrontation', it would be tantamount to going back on the Chialun and Mingyuehkou policy and, in the long run, to making a mess of the revolution. Who hopes for a 'frontal confrontation'? Only the Japanese imperialists.

"We mustn't be deceived by their tricks. These savage 'punitive operations' are designed, first, to dampen the Korean people's fighting spirit and, second, to draw the fledgeling Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army into the open, and to nip it in the bud. We won't be caught by such a transparent trick. Don't you think so? What shall we do then, comrades? Should we be cautious and just sit and lick our wounds? Hardly. That is not what we took up arms for, and we will not shirk our responsibility for our people's destiny, act against the people.

"On my way here with Comrade Chon Gwang Sik we met

the survivors of the 'punitive operation' in the Wangching area. They said.... They...."

His easy eloquence suddenly ceased. He had a tense look, as if he was about to say something in a very angry voice, but his mouth remained tightly shut.

He saw the child with the burnt sleeves, the tearful eyes of the woman who had looked up at him, her face covered in ashes, saw the village in flames and heard the agonizing cries of the victims echoing across the valley.

After a few seconds he looked round with flashing eyes, then he went on speaking slowly.

"So what is to be done? The answer is clear. We must build up and strengthen the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army untiringly. Whatever others say, no matter how the situation may change, this comes first. How shall we increase our strength? We must grow stronger in continuous struggle against Japanese imperialism. We must develop and fight, fight and fight and develop. What, then, shall we do about these 'punitive operations'? We should tackle this by setting up our own bases and defending them. What is most important right now is what we will do this year. We must organize companies and battalions in many areas as soon as possible. Guerrilla units must be formed everywhere. At the same time we must set up bases along the length of the Tuman-gang as we had planned. The bases must be as widespread as possible. Some of them may be set up in the form of a liberated area and others may take the form of semi-liberated or half-liberated areas—it will depend on local preparations. Since you have been making these preparations, you may just push straight ahead. However, this measure won't solve all our problems now. So what next? We will send out a large unit, an expeditionary force, through a huge area stretching for several thousand *ri* from the north down to the south. Right after our meeting, the expeditionary force will leave for the Amnok-gang River area. To do what?

"First, to confuse the enemy, to prevent them from seeing our intentions, our zones of activity and our line of action. In particular, this force will decoy and disperse enemy troops that are concentrated along the Tuman-gang now, which will protect the population and the revolutionary organizations in this area from the brutal Japanese massacres and open up a favourable phase for us.

"Now, since this zone of expedition is bordering on the

Tuman-gang River along which widespread revolutionary bases will be set up and we will carry out our activities in the future, we are going to sow the seeds of revolution in advance.

"In addition, we will exert our influence on the remnants of the Independence Army and the Chinese nationalist anti-Japanese forces scattered over this area and expedite the formation of a united anti-Japanese front with them.

"I can't tell if this expedition will take six months or more. But this is the road to victory, and we must take it at all costs, it is demanded by the revolution. The unit will be our main unit in Antu under my command.

"Comrades, this is a rough outline of the policy to tide over the present crisis, to advance our armed struggle against the Japanese.

"What do you think of it, comrades? This policy could turn our hardest year into a glorious year; we must make this year of 1932 the turning point in our long and arduous journey, so that ten or twenty years later from now, and even in the far-distant future, we will look back on this year as a harsh but worthy year. A seed has broken its shell and sent forth a bud up out of the good earth. Now it must stretch its branches and blossom forth. And it must form a ring for this harsh year. This first ring in the centre appears to be a mere dot. But you'll understand how precious it is for a sapling that will grow into a big tree...."

Comrade Kum Song stopped talking and looked around.

Everybody was breathless, their eyes fixed on him.

"What do you think?" He asked. "Give me your opinions."

Smiling, he again looked round and got to his feet.

Casting his eyes at him, Li Hyok was gradually absorbed in a deep, solemn meditation. Song Dok Hyong, seated beside him, pulled out his handkerchief and wiped the corners of his eyes, giving a long sigh.

"Everything is clear now. The first ring of a massive tree.... That's right." Somebody called out and wiped his forehead.

Now, pacing leisurely beside the campfire, his hands behind his back, Comrade Kum Song made detailed explanations on how to strengthen the guerrilla army and how to set up the bases.

His figure was set in vivid relief against the night sky ornamented with pearl-like stars.

Chin Il Man took off his spectacles and followed his every

movement, his hand touching eyes moist with tears. Chin was gripped by the excitement of a man who had broken through an iron wall. He felt his body overflowing with great pride and joy. He felt as if he were running along a highway of revolution, that had been newly laid.

Li Hyok remained seated with bated breath, his head raised. His heart ached as he looked back over nearly ten years of groping in the dark. But instantly he was delighted with the fact that he had a great leader now. He felt as if he were stepping, newborn, out of his past.

His tense brow quivered and, abruptly, he turned his face up to the sky. The stars were shedding a green light.

"My dear homeland, your cause has been embraced by a sagacious and great leader!" Li Hyok called out in his innermost self.

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The meeting ended late in the night.

Comrade Kum Song suggested that some technical matters be left over till the morning. Now the others were talking to each other boisterously on their way to the log cabin where they were to be billeted. Although the meeting was over, they seemed to have just started their discussion, and it was obvious that they would be arguing all night. After Comrade Kum Song's policy briefing, bright ideas streamed into their minds like a flood bursting its dam; full of energy and purpose, they were conjuring up one novel plan after another.

Comrade Kum Song stood by the campfire, watching the comrades dispersing down the mound in the faint moonlight.

"Let's go down to your billet, Comrade Commander. It's very late. You'll be staying at the hunters' cabin down in the valley," said Han Hung Su, who stood beside him, in a low voice.

"Thank you. But have you prepared bedding for everybody?"

"Yes, we have. Pak Hung Dok got everything ready."

"Have you got enough covers?"

"Yes, we've got blankets."

"That's fine. But would you go and see if everything's all right—it's late, and I'm afraid if the room may have got cold."

"I understand," replied Han Hung Su. He was going, when Comrade Kum Song called him back and asked.

"Have you heard what happened to Comrade Chol Gun's family, Comrade Han?"

Han Hung Su was at a loss what to say. Li Chol Gun had repeatedly asked him not to tell the Comrade Commander about the death of his family.

However, he seemed to know all about it.

"Yes, I have but...." He faltered.

He asked no more. Instead, he asked him to send Li Chol Gun and Li Hyok to him.

"I'll spend the night with him, though I don't suppose it will be much comfort to him...." His voice was very sad.

Han Hung Su took a few steps backward, and then darted down the hillock.

Now the moon was bright.

The round aspen leaves and the big thick *tarae* leaves that had only just come out swayed elegantly with every warm gust of wind and reflected the moonlight.

When Li Chol Gun and Li Hyok came to the hilltop, following Han Hung Su, Comrade Kum Song was walking along the thicket trail, plucking leaves and glancing up at the moon through the branches.

Walking close beside him, Li Chol Gun knew what his silent Commander had on his mind.

The Comrade Commander was silent until he turned round the crest of the hill. Then he slackened his pace and placed his hand on Li Chol Gun's shoulder.

"Comrade Chol Gun, what did you plant on that field this year?"

"Which field do you mean?"

Perhaps he meant the tract of land on the rise at Big Valley, but Chol Gun was not sure.

"The field where there was a lookout shed when I was there."

"Oh, I planted maize this year, too."

"Did you?"

He nodded and was about to say something, but then kept silent.

If he meant the maize field, he must be thinking of the summer of the year before last.

It had been night then, too. When the wind blew across the field of maize that was in flower then, it carried a fresh scent of summer grass. Comrade Kum Song had taken the trouble to come onto Big Valley after an inspection tour of the Yenchi and Holung areas. At that time Chol Gun had a lookout shed in a small melon patch where he would meet political workers. As there was no other place, Chol Gun had brought Comrade Kum Song there.

He worked there deep into the night, acquainting himself with the activities of the organization in this area and giving instructions on the preparations for arming the members.

As dawn was approaching, there was the sound of corncobs being broken off the stem. Chol Gun climbed out of the shed, and Comrade Kum Song followed him down to the edge of the field where they found Chol Gun's mother making a fire with some pieces of wood. She had been on the lookout.

"What are you doing, mother?" asked Comrade Kum Song, squatting on the grass.

"Oh, nothing special. It's too late now, so...."

"Why, you have got corn there!" He was as happy as if he had found a treasure.

"The kernels are not yet full...." There was a faint smile on her wrinkled face. Two corncobs were roasting on the fire. Sometimes, the kernels popped, blowing up the ash. An appetizing smell floated up from the yellowish kernels.

The mother rolled out the roast corncobs with a piece of wood.

"Have some, you must be hungry."

"They're very well done, mother."

"The fire is a bit too strong."

"There's nothing like sweet corn roast right in the field."

His mother had beamed with delight, for she had been uncertain whether the guest would like it or not.

Holding a corncob in his hand, he looked at the mother's coarse hemp jacket and the hood that was wet with dew. The three sat round the fire and ate the corn. Comrade Kum Song said:

"This is lovely. This sweet corn reminds me of my home village."

Then he talked about his grandparents, thinking of his far-off home with deep emotion.

As the long tail of the Plough was setting behind the Mapanshan, he held her hand and said:

"You, mothers, are having hard times now, far from home, but we'll reclaim the lost homeland so that you can live happily back in your homes, remembering your old times. I wish you health and a long life."

The mother's eyes were moist and shone in the moonlight, that was still fresh in his memory.

"Well, I'm sure we'll be roasting sweet corn again one day."

Li Chol Gun, who was walking silently, enwrapped in remembrance, looked up.

"But I don't know if it'll taste the same." His soft voice shook Li Chol Gun's heart. Suddenly he stopped walking. His shoulders were shaking. The Comrade Commander paused and stood in front of him.

"Comrade Chol Gun!"

His voice was hoarse. As Li Chol Gun raised his head, he took his shoulders in both hands and said:

"We cannot change it. You must endure."

At this moment Chol Gun lurched forward to him.

"Comrade Commander!"

Li Chol Gun's sobbing echoed through the quiet thicket.

"Even when we are free, we won't be able to take your mother home. But what can we do? You must be firm and cheer up...."

Tightly hugging Li Chol Gun's shoulders which shook violently, he stood still, staring up at the starry sky.

After a while, he sat down on a rock with Li Chol Gun. They would not sleep tonight.

Presently he raised his arms wet with dew and stood up, holding Li Chol Gun's hand.

Han Hung Su and Li Hyok followed them slowly, watching from a distance.

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Next morning, after breakfast the meeting was resumed in the log cabin.

The Comrade Commander flattened out his map and ex-

plained in detail what action should be taken to form guerrilla units for different sectors and establish liberated areas.

At the entrance to this valley, not far from the cabin, Pak Hung Dok had been on sentry duty, sitting in a crevice in the rock, his Japanese 38-rifle in his hand. He was now looking downward, vigilant.

A young man in a Korean jacket and trousers, with a kerchief round his head, was wending his way up. He carried a stick and had a knapsack on his back. He skirted a hill densely covered with ash and maple trees, turned off by a rock and took the trail leading to where Pak was.

Pak first intended to challenge him, but changed his mind and only watched him closely.

The young man had obviously spotted Pak because he stopped and looked up. He even seemed to be grinning at him.

Now Pak Hung Dok had to get down out of the crevice. He asked him who he was in a rather hushed voice.

"Yes, it's me."

"Who is 'me'?"

"I've just happened to take this way."

"There is no road here."

Sticking out his rifle, Pak Hung Dok bawled that no chance traveller was allowed to come here.

"Well, listen. I've something to tell you."

"Go back. I'll shoot if you don't obey."

"Oh, stop it. Listen to me, please. You are a guerrilla, aren't you?"

"What? A guerrilla?"

Pak Hung Dok was surprised, yet there was a broad smile on his face. At the crevice he had been racking his brains for a plan to free himself from his underground activity to join the guerrillas. He had nothing against working underground, but he wished he could take up arms and fight, to be an armed guerrilla. And he had been thinking of how to seize an opportunity to make his request to the Comrade Commander himself.

"So you mean I look like a guerrilla?"

"I'm sure you are. I recognized you as a guerrilla at a glance down there."

"So what if I were a guerrilla?"

"I've a request to make."

Pak was convinced by now that the young man was not a spy. He was a peasant, probably on a long journey.

Talking to Pak Hung Dok, the young man walked up to him.

He put his knapsack down on the rock, smiled happily, as if relieved of worry.

"What do you want me to do for you?" asked Pak Hung Dok. He faced the stranger, fumbling with the strap of his rifle.

"Well, I want to join the guerrillas. I want you to tell me where I can join them."

"What? Oh, what a man!" Pak Hung Dok laughed, giving a push to the young man on his shoulder.

"Well, you do have an opinion of yourself, don't you? You want me to accept you for the guerrillas? Listen, man. I'm not a guerrilla myself."

"Please, don't pretend—who do you think I am?"

"What, are you trying to pick a quarrel with me, eh?"

Reluctantly, he asked the young man to sit down against the rock.

"You stay here and don't move." Pak Hung Dok pressed the young man's shoulder, and slinging the rifle on his shoulder, climbed up the rock. With still greater vigilance, he made a round of the posts and then came back.

Pak Hung Dok squatted down opposite the young man and started talking to him.

He had been certain right away that this young man with large eyes and high cheek bones was simple and honest. He looked 20 or so.

His name was Choe Chil Song. He had left Ssoksae Valley over a hundred *ri* away from here ten days ago in an attempt to find the guerrillas. He had been on his way to Liangkiang today when he happened to see a man with a rifle.

Pak Hung Dok felt a little embarrassed because he was not a guerrilla, but since Choe Chil Song insisted that he was a guerrilla, he thought it better to behave like one.

Feeling greatly relieved, Choe Chil Song took off his kerchief and wiped the sweat off his forehead, and then ran his envious eyes over Pak Hung Dok's grey worker's tunic and trousers and his canvas shoes.

Pak Hung Dok was not suspicious of this man, but thought that he was not allowed to get involved in idle conversation in the light of the weighty responsibility he was carrying right now.

"Hey, man! You've had enough rest. I guess you'd better

leave now. I've got my own business to see to." Pak Hung Dok rose to his feet and started casting vigilant eyes along the foot of the mountain.

"Please, do me a favour. You don't know how long I've been looking for the guerrillas! If you knew, you would not make me leave. I want to join the guerrilla army at all costs. Three of the boys from my village went before me. I didn't know about it because I was off in Hoeryong buying salt. Oh, I was so unlucky! If I had been at home, I could have gone with them for sure. Look at this knapsack. I had this made a month ago."

"What a hard case you are! Look here, man. You think the guerrillas will admit anybody who wants to join them?" said Pak Hung Dok with a dignified air. This made Choe Chil Song uneasy. Pak Hung Dok cunningly tried to cow this man so that he would give up.

"Are you afraid I can't fight with the guerrillas? I'm strong enough to do twice the ploughing the others do." Choe Chil Song rubbed his shiny sun-burnt chin with his huge hand and made some rather incongruous noises that were a mixture of entreaty and protestation. This firmness was unusual for this peasant, he had long been forced into believing what other people said and had become accustomed to obedience.

"What do you think the guerrillas are? They are not peasants who plough the land. They are armed troops who fight the Japs and liberate our lost homeland. They are a group who make revolution. Understand?"

"Well, I want to make revolution, too."

"You want to make revolution? You are really giving me a hard time. You can make revolution without joining the guerrillas, can't you? You can join the Young Communist League or the Anti-Imperialist League."

Suddenly, he felt himself blushing. The words he had just uttered were what Han Hung Su or the Comrade Commander would say if he pressed his request to join the guerrillas.

Choe Chil Song wrinkled his brows and fumbled with the strap of his knapsack, screwing up his courage.

"What did General Kum Song say at Mingyuehkuo? As you are a soldier, you must know it better than I do."

"What about it?"

"He appealed to Korean youths to take up arms and join in the battle against the Japs."

"So what?"

"So I can't just sit and twiddle my thumbs—I am a Korean youth, too."

Choe Chil Song had been told of the Mingyuehkuo Meeting a long time ago in Ssoksae Valley, his village. He had not heard the details of the meeting itself, but he did know that young men had been called on to join the guerrillas and there would be a decisive battle against Japanese imperialism.

But he was very worried that he could not talk well enough, that he would not be able to persuade this man with the rifle.

"You are right there. But you are wrong if you think that just anyone can get in the guerrillas."

Choe Chil Song felt that he was making headway, but he was afraid that his shrewd opponent might find many faults yet.

"Well, let me see if you are ready to be a guerrilla."

Pak Hung Dok sniffed and pondered for a while, but could not think up any question to ask him. He was quite embarrassed. He felt as if he were facing a strict examiner like Han Hung Su, not just a youth called Choe Chil Song.

"Have you got any education, friend?"

"Not much."

"Don't be so modest. Tell me what you know about the *Communist Manifesto*."

"What?!"

"Why are you so surprised? You mean that's easy? It's not that simple matter, you know."

Choe Chil Song's face went very red.

But noticing this, Pak Hung Dok, too, felt the blood rushing to his face. Last year he had borrowed the booklet from messengers and had made two attempts to read it, but he had not managed to understand it. Yet having raised the subject, he felt he should put it to good use to drive this young fellow away.

"Come on, then, tell me about it."

There was no response.

"You have to know that before you can start making revolution, or joining the guerrillas."

"To be quite honest, I'm unlettered."

"You mean you couldn't get any education? Didn't you go to the night school? You surely have the Anti-Imperialist League in your village in Ssoksae Valley."

"Yes, we have, but I couldn't go."

"Why?"

"My old master wouldn't let me—he said that I'd become Communist."

"What old master?"

"The landlord whom I worked for as a farm servant."

"Oh, were you a farm servant, then?"

"Yes."

"Then you were in the same boat as me. We, farm servants, are the rural proletariat. So you need a better knowledge of the *Communist Manifesto* than anyone else. This Manifesto is a torch that lights the road for the proletariat. Well, now, tell me what imperialism means."

"Imperialism?"

This word sounded very familiar to Choe Chil Song, but he didn't know how to begin. He didn't want to show himself up, to lay bare his ignorance again, for he thought his admission to the guerrilla army would depend on his answer. And when he did get started, it took him all his energy to say:

"Imperialism is the Japs who have wormed their way into our country, you know."

"Go on."

"They suppress and beat our workers and peasants and work them hard. They are as bad as robbers. They use bayonets and rob our country of her wealth. That's why they cause war. We must knock down imperialism at all costs. So I want to join in the guerrilla army."

He spoke with great difficulty, watching Pak Hung Dok, who was looking restlessly at the foot of the mountain. His reaction didn't seem too favourable, and Chil Song was crestfallen. He rubbed a stone with the tip of his straw sandal and hung his head.

Pak Hung Dok didn't know what to do. He saw that he shouldn't have prolonged this conversation; he had caught himself with these unnecessary questions and he was at his wit's end. So he told the young man that his answer was not bad, but he was still far from qualified to join the guerrillas. This dispirited the young peasant so much that he felt sorry for him. Yet, there was no solution. He first thought of taking this man to Han Hung Su to explain the situation, but then he didn't think it such a good idea.

Choe Chil Song picked up his knapsack from the rock, put it in his lap and undid the strap. He produced a rolled strand of tobacco leaves. He tore a piece off an old newspaper with his

thick sun-tanned hand for Pak Hung Dok, and offered him a smoke. Pak rolled himself a cigarette.

Choe Chil Song puffed at the rolled cigarette without a word. A heavy cloud of smoke came out of his big nostrils.

Pak Hung Dok felt an urge to give him a hug, to say "Let's work together," but he couldn't do it. Soon his eyes were moist with tears. He said to himself: "Now is the time for farm servants to rise. Yes, it's high time they freed themselves from their wretched plight...."

When they had finished smoking Pak Hung Dok reported to Han Hung Su, who instructed him to tell the young man to wait at Liangkiang.

"Well, friend, your problem is nearly solved. He has as good as approved your application." Pak Hung Dok was as pleased as if it was his own problem that had been solved. He patted him on the shoulders and explained to him in detail how to get to Liangkiang.

At this very moment a messenger arrived from Liangkiang.

Inside the log cabin the meeting was drawing to a close.

Comrade Kum Song had just made his concluding remarks about the immediate establishment of bases as already planned, the formation of an expeditionary force and the reinforcement of local representatives.

Before the meeting was over, he had arrangements made for Li Hyok to be sent north and for Pak Gi Nam to assist Li Chol Gun in his future work.

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Comrade Kum Song read the message from Liangkiang. It said that a Japanese army convoy of horse-drawn carts was moving north through the area from the direction of Chongsong. This was reported to be the third in two days.

Having wound up the meeting, he walked up and down the yard for a while, deep in thought.

"How do I interpret this movement? It's quite a small enemy force. Is it an ordinary supply convoy that does not change things, or does it mean a part of their project to open a new route?"

Nowadays Kwantung Army troops often moved about, just to create fear among the population. These movements took place adjacent to highways from dusk to dawn. Sometimes cavalry would join the infantry units or they would mobilize carts and trucks. These units, which were not very large, would cross the highway, and turn round in the mountains and then back along the highway again. In this way, a single battalion could create an impression of massive troop movements all through the night. While pretending to prohibit the people to watch troop movements, the Japanese, in fact, tolerated them watching. They would stage this sort of spectacle at different places up and down the country in a crafty endeavour to keep vast areas under control with quite small forces.

At first, Comrade Kum Song thought that the northbound convoy might well be part of such a spectacle. However, the enemy was cunning and might have some other sinister objective, might be using these already well-known tactics as a smokescreen.

In a few months following the "September 18 Incident" that the Japanese framed up, they occupied the vast Manchurian territory. They had to hold it in an iron grip with a comparatively small force—only tens of thousands. So they used a combination of craft and bloody atrocity; they were not particular about their methods at all.

The Japanese plan of aggression in Manchuria, Mongolia and other parts of Asia had been worked out much earlier, and perfected by Prime Minister Tanaka a few years ago in his notorious "Memorial to the Throne". The Japanese imperialists were so avaricious that they rashly occupied Manchuria, the "fertile breast of Asia", even before they were fully prepared.

Basing on the assumption that the combat capabilities of an army depended heavily on its logistics, the enemy had set up three main supply routes.

One ran from Port Arthur to Mukden through the West Sea. This was like the athlete's starting line, which had now done its job. Another was the central line connecting Pusan and Sinuiju through the Korean Strait. By now this route was as meaningless as the first one because it could not guarantee real mobility. The third route led to Kirin and Moutanchiang via Chongjin and Hoeryong. Though set up somewhat belatedly, this was more effective than the other two together. That was why the Japanese imperialists had speeded up the work on building the

Kirin-Hoeryong railway line and why the mass struggle against the project in 1928 had been a telling blow.

Why were they using the road instead of the railway? The enemy was not in a position to station his troops in the mountains because as yet he hadn't got the major cities completely under control. So the Japanese troops coming into the mountain areas could have no other aim than "punitive operations" against the guerrillas.

Pacing back and forth in the yard for a long time with his hands behind his back, he finally made up his mind to start the first battle.

The people must see that the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army had started fighting. However small, its operations would be a great encouragement to the people, and a bitter blow against the enemy.

He called all who had been at the meeting out into the yard and unfolded his operational plan to hit at the enemy convoy.

His grim eyes sparkled with a firm resolve.

He took a couple of steps sideways and then turned to look at them.

"Let's have our first battle."

He raised his fist and then hit the air before going on to say:

"Let us solemnly declare to the enemy that the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army has begun to fight. Let us avenge the people of Big Valley. We must show the Japanese imperialists that from this year, from 1932, every step they take in this land will bring a merciless reprisal. Let us take this first step without hesitating. Now come and sit round here. Bring me the map, Comrade Han Hung Su."

Han Hung Su flattened out the map on the ground and put a stone on each corner.

After Comrade Kum Song's briefing, they all set off on their missions.

Kwon Man Song and Song Dok Hyong left for the Chongsong area on a reconnaissance mission and Han Hung Su and Li Chol Gun started for Fog Valley through which the enemy was to pass. Choe Gi Gap and several other comrades went to Liangkiang to fetch the guerrillas who were to concentrate there.

Li Hyok and Pak Gi Nam wanted to do their share in the fighting but Comrade Kum Song said that they must not because they were not fully recovered yet.

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An electricity pole can be seen through the wormwood bushes to which some shrivelled leaves still cling. The pole is dwarfed by the height of the wormwoods. The road follows the near side of a little winding stream, while on the far side, a flat field soon gives way to a steep mountain.

Han Hung Su is lying on his belly. The earth is cold and damp. His hands are wet with sweat. Now and again he rubs them on his sleeve, but the butt of his pistol is soon wet again.

"As soon as the enemy appears I must give a warning shot. Then the enemy will fire at us."

Han Hung Su imagined a fierce battle. Formations of bombers are flying overhead; tanks are crawling along the ground. Long-range guns roar, filling the air with powder smoke, and their thunder shakes the ground. Lines intersect the sky like red-hot wires and sparks flicker overhead. The battle is confused. He charges and falls on the ground. We overrun the enemies. Earth spatters all over. The deafening shouts of hurrahs are heard and flags flutter....

It is indeed a fantastic scene.

Li Chol Gun is lying in the crevice of a rock. Beads of sweat roll down his brow. His eyes are afire with revenge. His trigger finger is numb with the strain. The faces of his mother and his brother are before his eyes. He bites his lip and stares at the road down which the enemy will come.

After a few minutes, Li Chol Gun turns to look over his shoulder up at a rise where the Comrade Commander is. He is still sitting on the edge of a rock, gazing down intently.

Some paces down from Li Chol Gun, there is a hollow in which Pak Hung Dok crouches holding his rifle. His eyes seem to be sending out flames.

Comrade Kum Song asks Pyon In Chol, his orderly, if he is cold. He says no, he isn't. However, when Comrade Kum Song tells him that he looks frozen, Pyon admits that he is feeling a little cold, but adds that he can take it.

Comrade Kum Song helps Pyon In Chol to button up his coat, and tells him that soon he will be sweating.

The enemy troops are expected to come into sight in five or ten minutes. Comrade Kum Song has chosen dusk to strike them, for it will give his unit greater manoeuvrability, timing and distance. For though he has made each man repeat the details of his assignment, they still might get confused in the excitement of the operation. So he sends Pyon In Chol down to make them each go over their task again.

As a gust of wind sways the desolate-looking trees at the foot of the mountain, the soft scent of spring wafts over the men's faces.

Now Li Chol Gun is lying on his side because his chest is damp and sticky. He is in such a state of suspense that his very teeth are numb. Scenes from that last "punitive operation" float before his eyes; he can see the flames, and the women's agonizing cries ring in his ears. He bites his lip and his face becomes distorted.

"Bastards! You shall pay."

He stretches out his hand and bends aside a twig—a wide prospect opens out. He has a strange premonition that the enemy is coming right this minute. His heart is throbbing wildly and the blood beats in his temples. He tries to control his excitement with deep breathing, but in vain. He swallows so hard that his Adam's apple makes a sound before he changes his posture. He puts his toe against a stone to give him purchase for an instant leap.

Then, the next moment, he is suddenly completely calm. And everything around him seems as calm as he is. Not a grass stirs. At a corner of the road, perhaps a hundred and fifty metres away, a firefly circles and signals the enemy's arrival. For in two or three minutes, the clatter of horses' hoofs sounds on the road. Far away, where the road bends round the mountain black spots appear, one after another.

Another few minutes, and twenty-one horse carts are in the ambush zone. There is a loud report from the hilltop as the Comrade Commander gives the signal.

Rocks roll down towards the front, middle and rear of the convoy—the Anti-Imperialist League have come, brought from Liangkiang by Choe Gi Gap, and shouting for all they are worth, they send the rocks pelting down on the Japanese.

Boards split and boxes splinter.

There are a driver and one or two armed escorts for each

cart. The enemy are taken unawares—dozing on the carts, feet dangling, their rifles tucked under their arms.

They shriek and run in all directions. In the disorder, some of them start climbing up the very cliff down which the rocks are falling, and hit, they tumble down. Others leap into the stream and gasp for breath in the cold water.

Presently the few who recover from the confusion put up resistance. With savage yells, they form a line along the roadside ditch. They open fire, the sparks fly from the cliff and gunshots thunder through the valley.

But the group led by Li Chol Gun is right behind them, only ten metres or so away. They are to go into the attack at the second signal, but there is no signal.

Li Chol Gun thinks he has got confused, so he straightens himself up on his knee. There is no one in sight. He is worried, confused, thinks that he has missed the signal, and dashes forward. At that moment the signal sounds.

At the sudden volley from the rear, the enemy soldiers are again thrown into confusion.

Li Chol Gun has confidence in his marksmanship. He kills the nearest Jap with his first shot, and aims again at the back of another's head. Then he jumps into a pit, falls backward with his leg in the air. Recovering his balance, he grabs the Jap in front of him and throws him to the ground.

Pak Hung Dok darts forth a few seconds after the signal. Slow-moving, he can't get up very fast because he has been crouching for a long time.

He hits a Jap with his second shot. Then he stops shooting and throws himself into the confused melee.

"You Jap dogs. I'll send you to hell!"

Cursing and swearing, he grips his gun by the barrel and flails it round him, hitting Japs in all directions, for he can recognize guerrillas by the kerchiefs tied around their arms.

"Bash him! Bash him!" He screams out like a tiger.

Li Chol Gun uses his leg to throw down an attacker and on the ground he sits astride his belly. He drives his iron fists into the enemy's face. And soon the Jap goes limp. Li Chol Gun grabs his feet, drags him to the stream and throws him in the water. Then he turns round, and sees two men wrestling on the ground. He catches the Jap by the neck and throws him down. He kicks him in the chest, lifts up a rock as big as a water jar

and drops it on his head. "You dirty dog!" he curses and spits at the enemy. He looks round. There is a strange silence. But he is still not satisfied. Looking right and left, he runs down towards the stream. A Jap who has been lying like a dead man jumps up and makes a dash for the water.

"Where the hell do you think you are going?" he shouts and goes straight into the water after him, his eyes sparkling fiercely. For some moments they struggle in the water, then he drags the bull-necked Japanese up on the bank, by the neck. Drenched to the skin, the Jap, who is still conscious, pleads again and again, gaping.

"You son of a bitch! Where do you think you're fleeing? Once you are here in this land you'll never return, whether there are a million of you or ten millions. You must know that." Gasping, he pounces on the Japanese, knocks him down and grabs his ankles. He whirls the enemy's body round and throws it at the cliff.

"I'll kill everyone of you, you sons of bitches!" Li Chol Gun roars, with blazing eyes. He looks around to see if any Jap is left alive. There isn't. Only then does he wipe the sweat off his forehead with the back of his hand and stretches himself. Cheered by the thought that he had had his vengeance, he climbed leisurely up the slope littered with enemy bodies, spitting almost a handful of sand that was in his mouth.

Han Hung Su tied up three Japs who had surrendered, helped by Li Chol Gun. Then he lit a torch to investigate the scene.

Comrade Kum Song pushed his revolver back in its holster and put his hands on his waist.

There was a complete shambles beside the stream. The dim moonlight showed wheels torn off the carts, broken lockers and dead Japs all over the place.

He walked slowly, passing a fallen horse that was still kicking.

Then he noticed rifle ammo scattered all over the place. A box with the broken cover was stuck into the grass. He shook it. From the sound it was clear that a goodly part of the contents had fallen out. Nearby an oblong box was lying on the ground. One of the boards had been torn off. He took the top off and looked inside to find that the whole box was filled with brand-new rifles.

Han Hung Su came rushing up.

"I've got rifles."

"What?!"

Han Hung Su took one of the rifles out of the box and shouted: "Guns!!" His loud voice echoed through the valley.

The guerrillas hurried to him. They all helped themselves to rifles and jumped for joy.

"Guns!"

"Whoopee, guns!"

Li Chol Gun rattled the bolt handle. He had a terrific urge to shoot. Comrade Kum Song allowed him to fire.

Li Chol Gun flashed a big smile. He pointed the rifle up and pulled the trigger.

The loud report reverberated in the night sky.

"Fire it again."

Bang!

"And again."

Bang!

"And another."

Bang!

"We've received some lovely presents." Comrade Kum Song laughed cheerfully.

The battleground was searched. Twenty-four rifles were discovered in two crates. Three of them needed repair; they had broken butts or bent barrels. Only fourteen of those enemy soldiers had used were found. Then there were uniforms and canned food on the carts.

Pak Hung Dok and Choe Gi Gap stayed to clear up. Han Hung Su and Li Chol Gun accompanied the Comrade Commander home.

Han Hung Su went ahead, walking behind the three prisoners. On turning into the mountain trail, Comrade Kum Song looked over his shoulder and proposed:

"Let's rest for a while, so that Comrade Chol Gun can dry his clothes...."

They made a fire under a huge walnut tree. He sat by the fire with Han Hung Su and Li Chol Gun beside him. Pyon In Chol kept watch over the prisoners.

As the fire blazed up, the steam rose from Li Chol Gun's clothes.

"How do you feel, Comrade Chol Gun?"

This seemingly blunt question contained a multitude of meanings.

Li Chol Gun was unable to express himself, to tell the Comrade Commander what he asked. His heart was in the grasp of strong emotions. Love and hate, two incompatible extremities of feeling, wound together, which were mercilessly beating at his heart like a sledgehammer. In these few days Li Chol Gun's honest, open and simple personality had undergone a radical change, that even surprised himself. He turned towards his commander to answer, but could not open his mouth. Suddenly he felt a lump in his throat, and his nostrils quivered. He bit his lip and blinked his eyes. His heavy eyelashes and full lips were trembling. This iron-willed man who had not shed a tear even when he carried the bodies of his mother and brother out of the fire now wiped tears that ran freely down his cheeks.

He thought he had been able to take his pent-up vengeance for his loved mother and brother and for his village. He had not slept a single night since the "punitive operation", but had lain writhing in agony. And only today could he wreak his wrath on the enemies. "Every Korean must vent their rage in this way. Wives for their husbands, sons and daughters for their parents, mothers for their children, all must wreak their vengeance in this way. We must give the enemy a thousand, ten thousand times heavier blows. Let the aggressors know that once they set foot in our land they will never return home alive, and let them tremble before us Koreans. This is the way to take vengeance on our sworn enemies, the way to drive out the invaders and liberate ourselves. The Comrade Commander showed this in practice today. I'll do again what I did this evening. I'll charge the enemy position at his signal...." Li Chol Gun thought to himself.

"Comrade Commander!" he cried, holding himself very rigid, but then he could not go on. For a few moments his shoulders shuddered before his tearful voice was heard: "I'll rush forward to the final goal as I did this evening."

They had won the first battle. Now he was resolved to fight on until the day of final victory. A strong fighting spirit vibrated in his heart, but he could not find the right words to express it. Comrade Kum Song seemed to read his feeling and said in a low, deep voice:

"That's right. We've only just begun today. But I think this first step in defeating the aggressors is decidedly important.

We've only wiped out a small handful of Jap soldiers, destroyed a few supplies, but it was the first armed blow that the Korean Communists had aimed at the Japanese imperialists. We will hit them harder, on a larger scale, more often and quite mercilessly. We'll go on hitting them until the stronghold of imperialism crumbles."

Li Chol Gun sat listening to him, his eyes glued on his confident look.

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Meanwhile, Han Hung Su began interrogating the captives in fluent Japanese.

One of them had no cap on his drooping head. He was in a miserable state, with one of his sleeves torn off. Big built and wide eyed, he kept shivering like a leaf, though seated so close to the fire that there was a smell of singeing cloth.

"Where were you ordered to go?"

"To Kirin, sir."

"What for?"

"Well, quite honestly, I don't know, sir."

"What about you?" Han Hung Su rapped out to the next, a stocky fellow.

"Well, sir."

This "Well, sir" drove Han Hung Su mad.

"Why aren't you wearing your tunic? Were you in bed on one of those carts?"

"Well, sir. I wanted to show you my attitude.... Well, you know...that I had no intention of resisting...."

Seeing through this attempt to conceal his true colours, Han Hung Su looked at him with disgust and continued his interrogation.

"What's your rank?"

Instead of answering his question, the Japanese kept bowing right down so that his shaved head looked like a gourd, between his knees.

"Come on!" yelled Han Hung Su.

A bespectacled Japanese who was squatting by his side looked round carefully and said that he would tell the truth.

"This man here is a first lieutenant," he said, pointing to the man without his tunic. "He was the officer in command of the convoy. His name is Okamoto. And this man over here is an officer cadet. He's honest. He is from Kagoshima. He's been punished twice for drunkenness. Yes, sir. That is the truth, sir."

"And what are you?" Han Hung Su nodded to him whose goggling eyes made him look very cunning.

"Yes, sir. I'm not a soldier. Look, this jacket of mine is now in vogue in Tokyo. I'm a journalist. I'm a non-combatant. Have never taken up arms, sir. No, sir. No sooner had the battle started, than I put up my hands, sir."

"Is it true?"

This question animated him.

"It's true, sir. This is my identification card."

The bespectacled man took his notebook out of his pocket and produced a card.

"Hara is my name, sir. This is my picture here, as you will see. Yes, sir."

With a derisive smile, Han Hung Su placed his identification card on a rock. Indeed, Hara was an intellectual equipped with the spirit typical of that island nation. His flashing eyes and agile movement spoke of quick intelligence. This sort of man had the ability to adapt himself to every situation, and browbeating would not produce results. He might be as honest as he claimed, but Han Hung Su thought he saw a crafty motive hidden behind the calm expression.

Han Hung Su was not in a good mood at present, and decided to stop interrogating the Japanese too closely.

"Why the hell did you come here?!"

"Well, sir, I'll tell you frankly."

Hara became calmer. He seemed to be wondering who was the most influential of their captors, whose confidence he must win.

"I'm on my way to meet Lytton's team sent by the League of Nations for an on-the-spot investigation into the Manchurian Incident. I had expected to meet the team at Mukden last February, but in vain. I was called back to my head-office and was again instructed to get an interview with them here on the spot. So I got off at Chongjin and was going up to Kirin."

"Stop lying," bawled Han Hung Su, angrily stamping his foot.

Hara was stunned. He was silent and held his hands on his chest for some moments, using every effort to back himself up. He felt intuitively that his whole fate was at stake at this moment.

"No, sir. I'm telling the truth."

"Then why did you come this way, instead of going by train? I hardly believe that you're so poor that you have to make a long journey on a cart. You're a spy, aren't you?"

"I'm a correspondent, sir. That is the truth. Besides my exclusive interview, I was planning to write a travelogue about the land and the manner and customs in this part of the world. I intended to finish a book this year or next at the latest so that I can buy a little house."

"Study manners and customs here, to make money? Sounds reasonable, eh? You mean you are going to make money by describing what the victims of the murderous imperialists look like and how they feel?"

"As a journalist, I always advocate objectivity in press coverage. The mission of the press is to lead public opinion and to teach. We must report what the government does, but nobody can say that that means that we share all its opinions."

"You are a refined hypocrite. So what is your opinion of the customs in this part of the world?"

Han Hung Su's face wore an expression of disgust. The man was a ghoul, he was utterly abhorrent.

Comrade Kum Song was staring silently at Li Chol Gun's face. He paid little attention to Han Hung Su's interrogation.

Li Chol Gun was squatting heavily like a rock, his eyes fixed on the dancing flames.

Comrade Kum Song could see that Li Chol Gun was controlling himself with great effort. He had been unable to suppress his anger at these Japanese until a while ago. But now reason had again become dominant, and he stood aloof from the Japanese officers and the journalist who were begging for mercy.

As Hara was at a loss for a clear-cut answer, muttering some ill-assorted, incoherent phrases, Han Hung Su prodded him again.

"Why don't you answer? Have you seen what kind of ethnic customs the rulers of the 'Empire of Japan' have introduced here? I'll tell you something, though: we Koreans have an excellent custom. In our country, we do not allow aggressors to go home alive. A kind of burial custom, you might call it, yes?"

"I'm sorry but I don't know anything about it. I do want to acquaint myself with local customs here, but I haven't seen much, I've collected no material yet."

"Then I'll show you one of our customs right now." Han Hung Su winked at him and pulled up his holster, which had slid to his hip.

Hara was frightened and looked up when Han Hung Su went up to Comrade Kum Song.

Standing to attention, Han Hung Su reported on his interrogation and suggested that all the prisoners be shot.

"Shoot them all? As far as those liars are concerned, you can, because they didn't, in fact, surrender. But why kill a non-combatant?"

"He is so mean and cunning."

"Find out for certain what he is. If he's a real reporter, we'll better release him."

"Once he's free, he might well conduct a vicious propaganda campaign against us. I'm sure he will." Han Hung Su insisted recollecting the reporter's hypocritical eyes.

"Of course he may do a lot of mischief, as you say. Frankly speaking, he's pretty malicious and in a way we might do well to get rid of him. But he said he was a journalist and he did surrender immediately, did he not? And if he's a journalist, what he writes will be far more effective than all our handbills. We'll release him. But tell him one thing: That it won't be long before we can give him a real scoop. The headline will be: 'Korean Communists Crush Japanese Imperialism and Liberate Their Homeland By Their Own Efforts.' And through him we must tell them: 'Surrender and you'll be saved.'"

He looked at Hara, who was trembling with fear, looked up at the starry sky and laughed heartily.

At this sudden change in the atmosphere, Hara looked round at the people to whom he had paid little attention so far. He raised his head and gazed at Comrade Kum Song who was seated by the fire. But he hung his head again immediately, overwhelmed by the smile that still lingered on his lips. In Hara's opinion this expression belonged to only those who were firmly convinced of their faith.

Hara felt relieved because there seemed some chance of survival now, though his reason crumbled miserably.

He tumbled down and bent his knees, lowering his wavy

hair almost to the ground. All his limbs were limp and thin white fingers shook in his lap. Weeping, Hara looked down at the black earth in which he might well have been buried by now, of which he might easily have become a part. The flames flickered like a phantom, shaking his soul.

"Comrade Han Hung Su, we must go now. You will follow later. Well, let's go, Comrade Chol Gun."

Everyone disappeared into the forest, leaving Han Hung Su behind.

Some moments had passed, but Hara could not rise. As the strain lessened, he felt frustrated. And yet he was still attentive; he was wondering how to act now. Presently he raised his face and said:

"Thank you for saving my life. But I want to know who brought me to this and who then treated me so leniently."

"Do you? That's understandable. You were captured and have been released by the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army, the armed force of the Korean Communists who aim to destroy Japanese imperialism."

Hara gave a start and lifted his head and again lowered it slowly.

"Is that so? Now I understand. I'll remember it all my life, sir," murmured Hara in a faint voice. He wore a serious expression, his body leaning forward as if off-balance because of the spectacles on his nose.

While at head-office, he had read dispatches from his colleague at Mukden about the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army, and in fact he himself had been looking forward to an opportunity to write a similar piece; but the last thing he had expected was that he would run up against the guerrillas personally. So his shock was tremendous. Another shiver ran through his body. Yet even in this shiver of fear, his professional sense worked strongly in him.

"You mean that the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army is an armed force that intends to overthrow the Empire of Japan?"

"You still don't believe it? It's a fact."

"Am I to understand that you'll force the Empire of Japan out of Korea?"

"You may believe it or not. That's up to you. But you'll find out, for we certainly will."

To Hara this was utterly inconceivable. When he had first

heard of the Korean guerrillas, he could not treat the subject in this light.

For a good while, Hara was in a thoughtful, serious mood. He just could not believe all that had happened this evening, however hard he tried. It was fantastic that a Korean armed unit made a surprise attack on a Kwantung Army convoy. And could he believe the still more fantastic prophecy that Japan would be defeated and chased out of Korea by the Korean Communists?

"Excuse me, sir, but I have just one more question to ask. I beg you to understand that this is a serious professional question. How is it possible for your Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army to overthrow the Empire of Japan? Maybe you have massive troops at hand that we don't know about? If so, could you tell me how many divisions you've got now? If you've got a dozen or so divisions, how have you armed them? And what about their supplies? In short, I'd like to know your prospect of victory. Excuse me, sir."

"Why, you've made a really professional inquiry. It seems to me you just can't believe everything. In order to have a correct understanding you must free yourself from prejudice and subjectivism and must learn to see reality as it is. Are you equal to that?"

Hara again hung his head, in order to evade Han Hung Su's piercing gaze which seemed capable of seeing through his innermost thoughts.

"You don't look like a hopeless idiot. So, if you listen without prejudice, for a few minutes, you'll easily understand our calculations...."

"I can assure you that I'll try to be fair. A journalist has to be fair. That's why he is called the spokesman of public opinion."

"There, you are lying again. You said you were on your way to meet Lytton's fact-finding team, sent out by the League of Nations, to cover the 'Manchurian Incident'. And why are you taking all this trouble, when the people who created the 'Incident' are all on your side? For it seems that those who framed up the 'September 18 Incident' in Mukden are at the Headquarters of the Kwantung Army, are they not? Moreover, the Japanese imperialists are slaughtering us Koreans right and left. Only a few days ago a whole Japanese regiment was mobilized

to massacre thousands of Koreans at a place not far from here. This seems to me a far more serious incident than a burglar intruding into a house to steal some money and clothes. What do you think about it? But your press hasn't said a word about it, has it? So how can you claim to be the 'spokesman of public opinion'?"

The correspondent did not answer.

"Well, that's that. Now, let me answer your question. We have neither a secret plan nor yet a special method. Then why are we convinced that we can defeat Japanese imperialism? Our calculation is quite simple and thorough. To put it in a nutshell, the Japanese imperialists are armed robbers and we are the victimized masters of the house. We've risen up to safeguard our home and people, the dignity of our nation."

There was a brief interval, before Hara raised his head, saying:

"However, I understand that military confrontation is decided by force. Humanists have claimed that justice always rests with Africa. They say the same as regards Asia. However, the African continent has been divided up by the strong men from Europe. In America, Indians have been forced to feed the whites. And here, one side has many divisions. Incidentally, we have motorized forces whose capacity is formidable. So is our logistic capability. And the other side...."

There was a smile on Han Hung Su's face which was flushed by the fire. This led Hara to thinking that the captor might consider him to be rather rude, and might suddenly change his mind and shoot him with his pistol. His face stiffened and turned pale to his lips. Seeing this, Han Hung Su said:

"Go ahead and speak up. Don't be afraid that we'll change our mind and punish you for your comment. As far as we are concerned, speaking the truth can never be a crime. I know you are going to say 'You Communists have no divisions or corps. Your forces are small. How can you defeat all these tanks and divisions with such a tiny force?' Is that what you were thinking, yes? It's true, of course, and at first glance, there is all the difference between the two sides. However, we have one truly powerful weapon that the aggressors are unable to possess. It's a weapon called moral superiority. In other words, we have millions upon millions of hearts bursting with an urge to knock

down the aggressor, to be free. Do you understand? For this is a far stronger weapon than all of the aggressors' weapons amassed with money and lies. And our weapon is inexhaustible.

"You talked of motors. But planes and tanks and battleships do not always stay on the aggressors' side. For if we capture your motors or weapons, they will work just as well for us, will they not? Anyhow, no one can deprive us of our moral weapon. We'll defeat the imperialists by force of arms as well as with reason and morality, in an overall confrontation. So we have nothing to hide, nor are we afraid of polemics. Well, so much for that. I've one more question to ask you. About half century has passed since the 'Meiji Restoration'. What is your estimation of Japan's industrial power and productivity now? Can she put about a million under arms?"

"I think she could arm about three million."

"How about five million?"

"It's possible, if she builds up her industrial power. But three million is already pretty powerful."

"How about ten million?"

"That's not possible.... But I hardly think she'd need it."

"Yes, she does. It is absolutely necessary. Well, let's make it ten million at most. Now, they say you've got a great logistic capacity. How great?"

"Well, I'm not sure, but one might estimate that our engines are several times more powerful than all the work forces in Japan put together."

Hara's countenance, which had been distorted by fear, gradually showed a sign of relief, and now he was even bragging.

"That's not so big," Han Hung Su said, betraying his disappointment.

"We are going to arm ten million or so. But not with the matchlocks or shotguns that we used this evening. As soon as we have got a good supply route, our armament will be improved."

Hara tilted his head.

"Why, can't you believe it? The Japanese imperialists are bringing in large quantities of weapons. Tell them to bring them in quickly. Through Pusan, Chongjin and Hungnam. We can take them all. How's that? You don't believe it?"

"...."

"We don't go in for bragging. But I can tell you one thing."

At this moment he recollected what the Comrade Commander had said, and resumed with conviction:

"You'll get your scoop—under this headline: 'Korean Communists Crush Japanese Imperialism and Liberate Their Homeland by Their Own Efforts.' How do you like this? Do you understand what I mean? Maybe you can't understand it now. But we are firmly convinced of it."

"How can you be so sure?"

"I'll tell you. Our people have a great leader, and he said he would."

"Oh, did he? Who is he?"

"You want to know?" Han Hung Su picked up his field satchel from the rock and slung it over his shoulder. He was lost in meditation for a moment or two, before he spoke in a grave tone:

"The one who was sitting here. He is Comrade Kum Song, our Commander."

"What!"

"You needn't be surprised."

"Oh, I see. So he...."

A few minutes later two shots echoed through the valley. The two Japanese officers had been executed.

Then Han Hung Su and Hara parted company.

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Han Hung Su was treading along the narrow path winding through the wood. Tree branches and undergrowth twined his limbs and let go their hold with cracking sounds.

Lifting up his flushed face, he walked along briskly, thinking over what had happened that evening.

The sound of the rocks rolling down the precipice, the ensuing gunfire and the fierce hand-to-hand fighting that had only lasted half an hour or so. This was the whole course of the battle.

There were no formations of bombers or tanks. Nor was there any advance of infantry in single file or in loose order. There was no flag fluttering on the top of the hill. He had heard

no drums or clarions sounding the victory. Then what was it? Was it a battle? Yes, it was a battle. Not just a battle, but a revolutionary war.

One class was confronted with the other. The Japanese imperialists had had a showdown with the Korean people in miniature. A stern, merciless history had begun.

One fine morning, an ancestor of ours, whose body was still covered all over with hair, got up on his feet and threw a piece of wood at his prey. That began the long history of mankind. The mysterious fire lit by the thunder in the days when cold was man's greatest enemy started mankind off on rapid progress. For this fire scattered primitive people from warm zones into the vast cold wilderness, and led them to the age of reason.

The wooden spinning wheel made and operated by hand moved to the corner of an ethnological museum and steam was captured as an efficient servant to turn wheels. Since then mankind had raced ahead towards modern civilization at an accelerating speed.

Continents were discovered, speed reduced space and harnessed nature brought man new benefits.

And while he continually improved himself, man forced himself to crawl and dig the hole of shame right in the midst of civilization. In those days immemorial, man might starve to death when the weather was unseasonable or because he could not hit his prey with stones. Now he starved to death because he had got too much. A spectre began to haunt; it became a highly refined mass of idea, which the oppressed and humiliated held as a weapon to guarantee their lives.

Some fifty years later, one bleak winter morning people ran to the Czar's moss-grown Winter Palace surrounded with firm walls. With bayonets in their hands the workers and peasants leapt into the sumptuous marble halls ornamented with gold and silver and declared themselves the masters of history, the masters of the country, and the palace itself.

All these were stepping stones in the great ford of human life to get across to where the present was awaiting.

And one stone was the solemn signal fired by that gun on a slope in the Mt. Paekdu-san range that roused the Korean people to a heroic war of resistance. And it was also a great torch that shed a light of hope over continents of darkness,

backwardness and slavery, oppressed and exploited by imperialism.

Thus history had begun to turn on two great wheels.

One wheel was powered by the working class in every land, the other was pushed by slaves, by mercenaries and by people deprived of their own countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

In the not too distant future, children would be learning with a new world map. A map that shows their countries liberated from enslavement, marked in their own beautiful and conspicuous national colours, instead of the old map where metropolis and colony, Japan and Korea, are marked in the same colour.

This was what the Comrade Commander promised on this day.

Absorbed in these thoughts, Han Hung Su walked on. He was not conscious that it was night.

When he met the stream, he recovered himself and picked his way across the stones.

The people walking ahead of him apparently noticed that he was behind them and shouted something back to him. Han Hung Su again felt his heart beating and his whole body invigorated. He darted forward, hand on holster.

He was just going into the yard of the log cabin, when he heard Kwon Man Song's sonorous voice.

"How do you feel, Comrade Chin Il Man?"

This was answered by a roaring voice.

"Oh, I'm awfully happy. This is the way we are going. This settles all our arguments, and we are all agreed and satisfied. I feel as if I'd newly graduated from a political university. Ha, ha, ha...."

The slightly coarse voice of Song Dok Hyong answered.

"To hit the enemy by fostering our force and to save the people by hitting out at him. This is it. Right? But you can't just laugh away your error. You must criticize yourself severely."

"Of course, I must. Ha, ha, ha...."

"Ha, ha, ha."

Loud laughter rang through the valley opposite the log cabin.

Han Hung Su, who rarely laughed, stopped by the edge of the potato field and stood there, laughing up at the sky.

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The rain poured down in buckets. It was the first spring shower. Huge rain drops hit the thicket and washed away the corners of snow that had stubbornly clung to the valley.

The valley and thicket were cleansed and a fresh fragrance floated in the air.

Comrade Kum Song was walking beside Li Hyok along a winding mountain trail. A mist was rising on the surface of the trail on which drops of rain splashed.

The other comrades had gone and now Li Hyok was leaving for the north. He was the first man assigned to the vast northern region, to put into effect the policy mapped out at the Mingyueh-kou Meeting.

Li Hyok walked in silence.

He was proud of his important assignment but indescribably sad because he must part with Comrade Kum Song so soon.

"When shall I see him again? I might meet him in a year or two years. Or I might meet him on a far-off day in a town or in a thicket like this, unexpectedly in the liberated homeland, when we have completed our revolutionary work. Accident or misfortune may put me behind iron bars or on the gallows. Then I would remember and think about this moment. Whatever happens, there are hard and glorious days before us. I'm not afraid to give my life up for the cause he had proposed. I only wish I could live by his side to the end of my days. But I must go."

He could not control the violent beating of his heart as he walked on.

When he came out of his reverie, he stopped Comrade Kum Song.

"Comrade Commander! Please, go back. You've come more than ten *ri*."

"Really? I thought we've only just skirted one mountain. Well, let's go on walking. I love walking like this."

"Your clothes are drenched."

"Wet clothes will dry out, won't they?"

They crossed another hill.

Li Hyok stopped.

"Please, go back. Otherwise, I'll just stop here."

"What's the matter with you? I really feel fine. Any spring day is nice, but it is lovely to be in the woods in the spring rain. You cannot be allowed to monopolize it."

He gave Li Hyok a playful push, but Li Hyok would not budge. Time flowed past.

"Well, I can't help it. Go then. But write to me often, will you? I'll be leaving for the area along the Amnok-gang River immediately."

"I wish you good health from the bottom of my heart."

"Now, go."

He put his hands on Li Hyok's shoulders and looked for a while into his face, filled with the sorrow of parting.

Li Hyok's gaze faltered and wandered like the moonlight moving in the water. At this moment Comrade Kum Song pulled Li Hyok's shoulders towards him and clasped him in his arms.

"Comrade Li Hyok!"

"Comrade Commander!"

Lightning flashed, dazzling the grim sky, the misty thicket, the distant ridges and Li Hyok's eyes.

3

It was a cosy little village.

This village was called Liangkiang or Double River because it was at the junction of two rivers. Though a mountain village, it stood on a fairly large plain.

On one side the village was dotted with mulberry trees and there was a log bridge over the river by a hill on which a tall zelkova tree stood. Among its green foliage sat a magpie wagging its long tail, and holding a dead twig in its beak.

The wind rustled the willows along the winding bank and willow flowers rose up into the air like billowing snow flakes.

Children were running after butterflies along the edge of the field and where the mountain rose from the plain a puppy was busy chasing some bunting.

People were out on the mountain or in the field; they tilled the barren plateaus or the burned-off ground. The population of the village was small almost empty of life. In the yards and on the roads beaten by the warm spring sun, flocks of little chicks herded together like cotton flowers and cheeped.

The village was always quiet as a clear lake.

There were many hamlets like this skirting the long Paek-du-san mountain range. No one knew exactly when these villages had come into being. Most of them had grown up of people who had drifted there on the harsh waves of the world. They had come from the southern provinces, from the western and northern regions. Many had come after the ordeals of 1919; some came right after "Korea's annexation to Japan". Even now a family or two would come to the village each season—to settle or to move on. This did nothing to ruffle the tranquility of this remote mountain village.

Now the village that had been wrapped in a peaceful sameness suddenly came to life and took on a festive mood.

At dusk, the previous day.

Children fishing in a stream ran to the village with nets in their hands, young people hurried back, leaving their ploughs

in the fields, hopping straight across the furrows. Old people and housewives flung open their doors and dashed out into the yards.

"Where is our army?"

"In the yard of the Mill House."

"Have they guns?"

"Of course!"

"Goodness!"

Sturdy soldiers were squatting on their haunches all over the large yard of the Mill House.

This was the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army. All young, they were neatly dressed in khaki uniforms, gaiters and plim-solls. And several women soldiers attracted attention. Everyone stared in wonder at the soldiers' caps and shining arms. About half had Japanese rifles and the rest carried *yangpo* guns, *totung* guns and firelocks.

At first the villagers stared at them from a distance, but they soon joined them in the yard.

The people of Liangkang Village had heard about the new Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army nearly a month ago, and there had been rumours recently that the Japanese had carried out a "punitive operation" against some villages and had completely gutted another village. Then, one day, a young villager who had visited the Antu area came back with the news that the Korean army had been established. And a few days ago, a dozen or so youths had taken part in the attack on a Japanese army convoy at Turtle Neck Valley. The farmers in the village had been so excited that they travelled 15 *ri* to get a glimpse of the scene of battle, and had brought back broken wheels on a horse-sleigh. Since then there had been heated arguments day and night about this startling development.

Presently the guerrillas were billeted in some fifteen houses. Every villager wanted guerrillas to stay at his house, and the elders were only able to choose the billets after almost fighting off the overeager hosts. Soon the houses chosen swarmed with villagers, especially the Musan House where the women soldiers were billeted. The majority of them were mothers with babies on their backs and girls with pigtails. There were quite a few elderly women, too.

All the spacious rooms in the house were full to overflowing; people even sat down on the earthen porch and on the kitchen floor, and girls sat or stood outside the kitchen doors.

"Oh, how wonderful! Is it possible!" exclaimed one toothless old woman, touching a girl guerrilla on the shoulder of her uniform crumpled by rifle straps, running her fingers over the girl's skirt. Her eyes glistened with tears. Patting the sleek short hair of Myong Ok, an 18-year-old guerrilla girl, she asked: "My dear, didn't you have a pigtail?"

"She had it cut off when she joined the guerrillas, Grandma," replied Yong Suk, who had joined the guerrilla army at Antu.

"Oh, did she? What a girl! We old folks couldn't even go out of our houses at your age."

The guerrillas laughed, and all the girls joined in.

In another room Hye Yong, seated right in the middle of the crowd, was having a hard time, answering all the questions.

"Have you ever fired a gun?"

"Did your parents let you join the army?"

"Will the women fight a battle?"

And so questions were fired one after another.

The women guerrillas looked so strange, such superwomen in the eyes of the housewives that they kept touching them and encouraging them to talk. When, after an hour or so, they all realized that these were ordinary girls and women like themselves, whom one might meet anywhere, they were perhaps even more astonished.

Meanwhile, at the community school, a thatched dugout on the southern slope of the hill, the schoolmaster in a *turumagi* coat had gathered all the children together and was making an impassioned speech. He said the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army had been formed to free Korea by driving out the Japanese, that one unit, led by General Kum Song, had arrived in the village that day.

So, instead of going home, the fifty and more school boys and girls went tearing into the village to see the army and then straight on to spread the news for 20 *ri* around.

That night Comrade Kum Song made a speech in the school grounds, which were packed to bursting.

Comrade Kum Song gave a detailed explanation of the character and mission of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army and earnestly appealed to all to help the army of workers and peasants' sons and daughters in every possible way. He stressed that young men should join the guerrillas to fight the Japanese and that those who had special knowledge should contribute it

to national liberation, those who had money should give money, and those who could work should offer their labour.

He spoke until the first cock crowed. And his words soaked in like water on parched soil. There was a storm of applause and the people shouted hurrah at the top of their voices.

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As the sun was setting in the west, Quartermaster Pak Hung Dok went striding down the lane in a happy mood. He had been appointed company quartermaster on the very day he had joined the guerrillas. He had been at his wit's end how to feed and clothe such a large family and had not slept a wink that night. Now he felt better, more confident.

The day before, the Comrade Commander had asked him to get about a hundred sheets of white paper. He had worried at first, but after consulting some of his comrades, he had got the paper by noon the following day. And the Comrade Commander had praised him as an ideal quartermaster.

Now he was on his way to see how the platoons were getting on with supper. Leisurely he walked past the hill where the zelkova tree stood and entered the rear of the village.

He was only of medium height, but looked quite tall in his new uniform, which suited his sturdy body. The uniform, made of thick cotton fabric dyed with wild walnut tar, looked really fine.

His cap, a trifle small, perhaps, suited his rather high forehead, and there was something friendly about his face. In fact, his snub nose, his small smiling eyes, and his firm lips gave him a kindly look even when he was angry.

As he approached the back of the village, some of the boys in Platoon Three were chatting away noisily as they weeded the maize plot beside the house where they were billeted. They were not helping so much as doing something that was second nature to them as farmers—they could not just sit idle when there was farm work waiting to be done.

"Hi there, miner," he called out to a lanky darkish man who was chopping firewood in the yard.

"Well, do you believe what that woman said last night?" Pak Hung Dok asked him.

He was Cha Gi Yong who had worked in a coal mine until a month ago. The ex-miner straightened his back to fix the loose block.

"How can you believe such nonsense?"

"But she couldn't have made it up, could she?" said Pak Hung Dok, as he pulled out a scrap of newspaper the size of his palm and rolled a cigarette.

The mistress of the house came out in her apron to fetch some wood.

"That's plenty, thanks. You must be tired," she said.

Cha Gi Yong glanced over his shoulder at Pak Hung Dok but, as if uninterested in his question, raised his axe over his head and brought it down with great force. A thick log split in two under the blow. The woman stood up with her armful of white-birch wood.

"Bring out all the logs to chop, Mother. He used to put up pitprops at the mine. Ha, ha, ha!"

Pak Hung Dok laughed, while the woman nodded with satisfaction, her face wrinkled all over.

"Why, he wields an axe better than any man I've seen."

"By the way, Mother. You know the woman who made that fuss in the school grounds last night? She is not a liar, I suppose, is she?"

Pak Hung Dok brought up the subject again because it was bothering him.

"You mean the woman from Tiger Rock Valley?"

"The woman who insisted that she had seen the General with her own eyes working as a farm hand."

"Yes, that's her. She is a very clever woman. But...."

The mistress of the house departed with an armful of firewood and then came out again.

"The cleverest woman is just as half as clever as man, as the saying goes. I think she said what she did because she was off her rocker. She must be out of her mind, otherwise she wouldn't have said a thing like that. It is not possible. The General couldn't have been a farm hand."

Clicking her tongue as if to show her annoyance at such an absurdity, off she went into the kitchen again with more firewood.

"That's right." Pak Hung Dok muttered to no one in particular, happily puffing at his cigarette.

If another couple of people agreed with him he'd be able to talk down all those who had disagreed with him that morning.

"So what do you say to that, miner?" asked Pak Hung Dok.

Cha Gi Yong did not even pretend to hear him and piled the ready-chopped wood up into a square tower.

"Oh, what a story! Our Comrade Commander a farm hand! I quite agree the woman must be crazy." Pak Hung Dok mumbled to himself and went on puffing. Only then did Cha Gi Yong stretch his back and look earnestly at Pak Hung Dok.

"Farm hands belong to the proletariat. Why don't you like them? You worked as a farm hand yourself for more than ten years, Comrade Pak."

"When did I say I didn't like farm hands? I just said that she must be crazy."

"But she said the woman is not a liar. Didn't you hear?" Cha Gi Yong said calmly but firmly.

"You mean to say you believe her?"

"It's not a matter of whether I believe her or not. You should be more careful when you say to people about this sort of thing."

Cha Gi Yong turned back to piling up the chopped wood, as if he were angry, tightening his lips, which covered a broken front tooth.

Pak Hung Dok went red. He wasn't going to give in so easily.

"How gullible you are! You are an unruly miner. I can't understand you, really I can't. You say this is wrong and you say that is wrong. What on earth are you trying to say? Is this what you call contradiction we learned at our last study session?"

"There is no contradiction. She probably mistook him for somebody else, that's all." And, disgusted, Cha Gi Yong turned on his heel to take a careful look at the first wood-pile and then started building the next square tower.

The General had finished his speech at two the previous night. And when the audience had begun to disperse, he had followed the elderly people up to the edge of the village to exchange a few parting words with them.

The woman from Tiger Rock Valley happened to see the General from a few feet away. First she was so shaken that she doubted her own eyesight. But he really was the man she'd seen when she had stayed at her parents' house in Fuerhho.

"Oh, my! He is the one.... Good gracious!" This astonished exclamation had attracted everybody's attention.

This rather bright and sprightly woman described what she had seen; she had been staying at her parents' house in Fuerhho during the last month of her pregnancy; and he had been very kind—he had cleared the ice from the slippery path to the well, which had been giving her a hard time.

Pak Hung Dok, who had worked as a farm hand since his early teens, was surprised at the time to hear this, but he felt as deep an attachment to the Comrade Commander as if he were a close relation. What the woman said was impossible, he thought; still, it was a matter of great interest to him.

On his way back from inspecting the preparations for supper in each platoon, he passed the zelkova tree.

About ten youths were gathered under the tree, holding a noisy discussion.

As he came nearer, Pak Hung Dok saw that in the centre of the group was a tall guerrilla who was obviously rather embarrassed. It was Choe Chil Song.

His face flushed, Choe was looking around for a way of escape.

"If we have to know it, then you'll have to tell us where to get it."

"What do you mean? I'm sure this man has it."

"What else should we read apart from the *Communist Manifesto*?"

"What about the uniforms? Should we get them made ourselves or will they be supplied?"

"Look, don't count your chickens before they are hatched. First, we are accepted by the guerrilla army, then we get around to the uniforms."

"Look, the guerrillas are an army, aren't they? An army needs uniforms and guns for a start! You want to join the guerrillas without understanding this!"

"Right, then. Guns are the biggest headache. So, what about the guns?"

Choe Chil Song was nearly at his wit's end by now.

After having met Pak Hung Dok at Small Plot, he had

waited for the guerrillas at the outskirts of Liangkang, and three days ago, to his great joy, he had been allowed to join the guerrilla unit. He had just been making the rounds of the village with his flintlock on his shoulder, when he had been besieged by these young villagers.

He had been showered with questions, and had just kept telling them that he knew nothing.

But he could not convince the young men who kept insisting that there was no reason why a guerrilla should refuse to answer their questions. An honest man, he tried hard to explain that he could not answer because he really didn't know. But it didn't help, for the more he refused to answer, the more questions they asked.

In this predicament, Choe Chil Song remembered what Pak Hung Dok had told him that day by the rock. So he shifted the conversation to the *Communist Manifesto*. At last, in spite of himself, he was playing the role of guerrilla advisor to the young volunteers. Now this pure and simple man was still further tormented by their insatiable curiosity.

Choe Chil Song was sweating heavily at the neck and his cheeks quivered.

His mouth was slightly open, as if about to say something.

The boys held their breath and waited, but nothing came.

Finally he swallowed hard and said bluntly:

"If you want to join the guerrillas, you must study hard and carry out the revolution well."

As soon as he had uttered, with great difficulty, these words, the young people started up again.

"You must tell us what we must learn. I go to night school."

"If all those who go to night school can join the guerrilla army, then we can all be guerrillas. What's wrong with you?"

"Look, what do you think the guerrilla army is? A university or something? If you are ready to fight the Japs, you can be guerrillas even without any education."

"Look at him—he thinks he knows more than the guerrillas."

There was a burst of laughter. They were all somewhere around 20. Their limbs were as strong as iron and their bronze faces shone.

Presently Choe Chil Song himself became confused into thinking that he was not telling them, but that he too was asking questions.

At this moment Pak Hung Dok craned his neck to look over their shoulders and shouted:

"What's all this racket about?"

They all turned.

Choe Chil Song was delighted to see Pak Hung Dok. With thick lips breaking into a smile, he wiped his forehead with the palm of his hand.

"You look as if you've just taken a steam bath, Comrade Choe."

"Oh, I'm all right. Look, you take care of these lads."

Slinging his flintlock over his shoulder, Choe Chil Song pulled his cap straight and ran off across the bridge.

He heard Pak Hung Dok's cheerful shouts from behind, but pretended he didn't.

"Don't give me a hard time, lads. Go and catch him and ask him your questions. Hey, Comrade Choe! Where the devil are you off to?"

But Choe Chil Song simply unbuttoned his tunic and fanning himself with his hand, walked off beside the stream.

In fact, he had asked a really awkward question, one that had stunned him, too.

"Did you read the *Communist Manifesto*?" He was dazed by this short question he had asked. He had uttered it almost unconsciously.

Choe Chil Song felt hurt and ashamed, much like a thief caught red-handed.

As he was turning the corner of the field, a young woman in a purple jacket and black skirt was coming towards him from the opposite direction.

Choe Chil Song stopped, taken aback.

This woman, who still had the reticence of a maiden, was carrying a vegetable basket. She walked past him with bowed head.

He blushed, and he could not help wondering why she reminded him so much of his own wife.

He had got married only a year ago, and he had a young wife just like her. He felt so embarrassed for some reason that he kept kicking stones all the way back to his billet.

After joking with the group of youngsters for a bit, Pak Hung Dok told them that he would inform the company commander of their request. He made them get in single file and

marched them to the yard of the house that was the company headquarters, and left them in charge of Han Hung Su.

Han Hung Su told Pak Hung Dok he had come just in time because he was just looking for him. Han Hung Su sent the young villagers to Chon Gwang Sik, the political instructor, and asked Pak to come into the house.

Han Hung Su told him that the Comrade Commander had given him the route for the coming march in the areas of Mt. Paekdu-san and the Amnok-gang River. He then explained to the quartermaster how he was to obtain supplies. A shrewd businesslike man, Han Hung Su talked a lot but Pak Hung Dok just drew a big circle in his mind from the upper reach of the Amnok-gang River to Tunghua and across Mt. Paekdu-san up to the north and back to the base.

Pak Hung Dok went back to his quarters, feeling the burden of the responsibility on his shoulders. He carried in a small round table, picked up a pencil stub, and wetted the lead with the tip of his tongue before drawing circles and jotting down notes in his notebook. He was not good at writing and had had no opportunity of learning since he had left the village school at the age of eight after learning *Thousand Characters* and some Chinese poems. His writing was so big and clumsy that a very few words filled a whole page of his notebook.

He drew a big triangle right in the middle of the page to indicate Mt. Paekdu-san and drew the Amnok-gang and Tuman-gang on either side. Then he marked the main points with circles. His unit would have to cover some 2,000 *ri* across deep valleys, skirting the Mt. Paekdu-san ranges towards Chunggang and then follow the Amnok-gang River.

Pak Hung Dok grew very excited. He made logistic estimates for the next few months, drumming the table top with his fingers or humming a tune.

"This is really something!" he exclaimed, wielding his notebook dotted with innumerable circles. Presently he went out into the yard.

It was sunset, and a hawk was circling high up in the red sky. He compared himself to this hawk. What a dull, monotonous year he had spent at the communications centre! But now, he was going to march right across a vast stretch of country, several thousand *ri*, and even climb Mt. Paekdu-san. This was something to which a man might well devote his whole life.

Time and again he had asked Han Hung Su to allow him

to join the guerrilla army. Though he had always been turned down, he had never given up, and finally his persistence had won. He considered himself very lucky.

As the Comrade Commander said, we are going to spread the seeds of revolution over all this wide area. How fascinating it would be to see the mountains, fields and forests, rough roads, strange villages and people and all that!

In this exhilarated mood he strolled slowly round the yard with his hands behind his back. Then it suddenly occurred to him that he had been asked to make a red banner. He stuffed the notebook into his pocket, and made for the house where Yong Suk and her friends were billeted, turning the corner of the maize field and walking past the pile of ashes.

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Comrade Kum Song was walking through the outskirts of the village with Han Hung Su along the road to Hsiaoshaho. That day he had finally made up his mind to visit his mother at Hsiaoshaho.

Han Hung Su had often suggested to his busy Commander that he should visit his home.

After sending out political workers to many places, he had been working early and late at Small Plot, taking little time for sleep, dealing with all sorts of organizational tasks to support their activities. Then, he had dispatched the guerrillas who had been prepared at Antu to different areas. He did this because he thought that rather than start from scratch it was better to reinforce the guerrillas in each area around comrades who had had some training and some military experience, even if very little.

Meanwhile, he recalled the guerrillas from some places, to join the march through the areas of Mt. Paekdu-san and the Amnok-gang River. His plan was to give a few months' training to those who had had no experience of guerrilla life. At the same time he made sure that the superstructure of anti-Japanese mass organizations—the Anti-Imperialist League, the Women's Association, the Peasants' Association and the youth and children's organizations—was built up in every district. These

numerous tasks did not allow him to leave his post. Nevertheless Han Hung Su had kept reminding him day in and day out that he must visit his home because he knew that Comrade Kum Song's mother had been seriously ill for two months now.

Meanwhile, Han Hung Su had used every opportunity to find out how the Mother was, and had sent her the best medicines he could get.

For all that, he knew that a visit by Comrade Kum Song himself would have a very good effect. It was planned that the guerrilla unit should return to this part of the country, but one could never be sure when once the long march had started. So when they were discussing the rendezvous of the expeditionary force, Han Hung Su had insisted on Liangkang, which was near Hsiaoshaho.

Whenever Han Hung Su asked him to go and see his mother, Comrade Kum Song had answered that he would think it over. But this morning Han Hung Su had been determined.

"Comrade Commander! If you cannot spare the time, I think I'll have to go."

"What? You mean you'll go yourself?"

"On your behalf...."

This was the strongest hint that the Comrade Commander must go, come what may. At the same time, it was perhaps his own dearest wish.

Comrade Kum Song was silent for a moment. Seeing the grave look on Han Hung Su's face, he said:

"Well, then, I will pay a brief visit. Comrade Han, I'm sorry I've put you comrades to such trouble."

So after a few hurried preparations, he set out.

Han Hung Su accompanied him well beyond the village.

"Please give my best wishes to Mother. Please tell her I'm sorry not to be coming. For if she heard that I was ill, she would come to me immediately wherever I was to look after me. It is indeed heartless of me."

Han Hung Su's eyes brimmed with tears, and as they met his, Comrade Kum Song turned quickly away.

When they had shaken hands, Han Hung Su stood on the hillside still and erect until Comrade Kum Song was out of sight behind the mountain bend.

Last year, in the early spring, Han Hung Su had had a bad bout of flu while engaged in underground activity and he had gone to Mother at Hsiaoshaho. He had been so feverish that

he had collapsed on the floor, barely able to greet her, and had lain unconscious for three days.

He came to at midnight to find Mother sitting by the head of his bed.

"Mother!"

He felt her hand holding a towel. He took it and pressed it against his chest. He felt the warmth of her love in her hand, and he was comforted and happy that he was with his own mother. Then he closed his eyes and listened to the beating of his own heart.

He had had no idea that he was under Mother Kang Ban Sok's roof—he had thought himself lying at his home in Namyang.

Presently he opened his eyes to find Mother Kang Ban Sok.

Seeing the look of perplexity and embarrassment on his face, Mother put her hand under the quilt and clasped his hand in hers, asking: "Do you feel better?"

"Mother!"

Han Hung Su had been moved to tears.

"I'm glad you're awake. I may not be as good as your real mother, but this, too, is your home and...."

With a sigh of relief, Mother had turned her tearful eyes towards the door. Han Hung Su stretched out the other hand and touched the roughened back of hers. In a shaky voice he said:

"I'm sorry, Mother."

"Don't say that if I'm your mother."

She looked anxiously at his drawn face, as if she felt that she had not lavished sufficient care on him.

Han Hung Su would have liked to express his gratitude for Mother's kindness, but he was quite unable to speak, and big tears rolled from the corners of his eyes onto the pillow.

He recovered from his illness and ten days later left for Fuerhho to report to the Comrade Commander on the situation at the lower zone of the Tuman-gang River.

Mother had worked all night, washing, ironing and mending his clothes.

He had walked all that day. Stopping for a rest on a hill-ock, he had unwrapped the bundle Mother had given him and found four foxtail millet cakes. Han Hung Su held them in both hands and looked towards Hsiaoshaho, calling out Mother again and again, through his tears.

Startled from his memories, Han had a strong desire to rush towards the mountain bend where the Comrade Commander had just disappeared, but he checked it with some effort.

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There were three houses at the dead end of Togijom Valley and Kim Chang Dok's house was the farthest. There was a tall white poplar in the yard, with a magpie's nest perched precariously on top. Underneath, two boys in straw sandals were playing a shuttlecock-game, while another sat astride a bough half way up, cutting off a branch to make sticks for tipcat. Now and again he looked up into the distance.

A woman in a white hood, a cord around her waist, was hurrying down the mountain slope, towards the log house, with a vegetable basket in her hand.

The boy sitting in the tree mimicked the magpie's call, pretending to look up at the nest. The woman paused, took off her hood and tucked it into the cord at her waist and quickly walked through the gate. The kitchen door was opened and Kim Chang Dok's middle-aged wife came out to greet the visitor.

When the inner door opened, Mother Kang Ban Sok took her hand and led her into the room.

"Thanks a lot."

Even when the woman was seated on the floor, Mother Kang Ban Sok did not let go of her hand, speaking comforting words to her. This woman had volunteered to work for Mother as a messenger to help her in her revolutionary activity. She had been working in the Yenhua area for some ten days.

First Mother asked after her health and if anything had happened to her. Then, she smoothed down her hair, a smile hovering round her mouth.

"I'm really grateful. You're looking better, too, I think. You've been successful, then? You must have had a hard time, though."

Mother laughed heartily and looked round as if inviting agreement from the twenty or so women who crowded the room. All the women were at ease, some touched the messenger's arms and others bowed to her.

"Thanks for your trouble, Gum Ok."

"You shouldn't have taken a mountain route in this part of the country. Why, your dress is all in rags, and your hands are all blistered."

"Well, she is a woman who always makes doubly sure, you know."

"Oh, dear, you must forgive me. You must be hungry."

Gum Ok raised her face, tanned by the spring sun, but looked down again immediately. She was embarrassed by her comrades' care.

"Go next door and lie down and rest, while we finish our business, do."

Making a sign to the mistress of the house with her eyes, Mother Kang Ban Sok gave Gum Ok a gentle push.

Silence reigned.

"Well, let me continue."

Looking around, Mother picked up her notebook from her lap.

"I have so far outlined how things stand with our present feminist movement, and I'm sure you've all understood it. Now let me touch briefly on our future tasks."

The women were very attentive. Their shining eyes were focussed on Mother, and their notebooks were held in readiness. They were active workers in the Women's Association. Some were from far away around Paishan, others from Wangching, Hunchun, Yenchu, Holung and other districts along the Tuman-gang River. They were mostly in their twenties, or their early thirties at most, and nearly all from villages, though a few came from miners or lumber-workers' settlements or from construction sites. On the extreme right was a schoolgirl with bobbed hair.

"From now, whatever work we are doing, our first call will be to see how best we can help our guerrillas. Of course, we have to do still better at our night school studies, we must go on fighting superstition, opposing premature and forced marriages and breaking down the feudal fetters. But before anything else, we must concentrate on helping the guerrillas, the way the ribs of a fan are gathered on the pivot. Then what is to be done first? I must stress first of all that many young Korean women should join the guerrillas and fight. For the basic aim of the women's emancipation movement is to claim and gain our legitimate rights as human beings, as mothers, as workers and as

peasants. Today the Japanese occupy our country, and we are exploited and oppressed by landlords and by capitalists, our fathers and mothers and even our little ones are savagely slaughtered. That's why we Korean women must join men in the sacred battle to destroy Japanese imperialism and reclaim our homeland.

"In some countries, women in their efforts to claim their equal rights with men, are demonstrating, demanding equal suffrage, seats in parliament and an end to the vicious habit of disgracing the fairer sex. We cannot do these things. For unless we take up arms and destroy the armed enemy, we ourselves will be destroyed. As Yun Suk has just said, the blood of mothers, children and young people is flowing in Big Valley. How can we women stand aside and look on?

"Yesterday a comrade said that our women still say that women cannot take up arms. We must awaken them, one by one. Here in this village there was a nursemaid in landlord Min's house. Her name was Yong Suk. I got to know her when I moved to this village. I met her last winter. Her father had been beaten to death by the Japanese at a railway construction site and her mother had died of hunger soon after she gave birth to a child. I suggested she should join the guerrillas and avenge her parents on the enemy. She was keen to do so. Our Women's Association branch demanded that the landlord let her go, and yesterday I heard that she is doing well in training to be a good guerrilla fighter. We must make a steady effort, and we must not try to gain results all at once. We must persuade one or two women today, ten or twenty tomorrow, and then a hundred or a thousand, to join the revolution, develop them as revolutionaries.

"Meanwhile, all women must help the guerrillas. We must provide them with food and clothing, which is no less important than the actual fighting. A guerrilla base will soon be set up...."

At this moment there came the mimical cry of a magpie from the tree outside.

"Somebody has arrived. Go out and look, Bok Sil."

Interrupting her speech, Mother Kang Ban Sok wiped her forehead with a handkerchief and looked at the yard through a peephole on the door.

Smoothing her hair which was parted and drawn back into a bun, she went on with her speech.

It was obvious that she was in great haste. She had had

scarcely a moment's rest since the day before, from taking reports and making speeches. The cadres of active women had been divided into several groups for meetings, and she had travelled long distances to preside over each and all. This time she had been strongly dissuaded from doing this, and all the women cadres had gathered together here. She said that the women's movement had to become more developed now that there was the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army. She suggested that the Women's Association's activities could be made more effective in keeping with the line of the Chialun Meeting and the policy mapped out at the Mingyuehkuo Meeting to carry out this line, and particularly with the changed situation since the guerrilla army was set up.

She attached great importance to this meeting. After forming the Women's Association at Paishan district, the first revolutionary organization of Korean women, she had called a meeting of organizers at Fusung a few years ago, and this was the first full meeting of all the district representatives since then. She had proposed right at the beginning that this must be no ordinary women's movement, and that it should have a class character and, as a part of the Korean revolutionary movement, must join the struggle to put an end to every kind of exploitation and oppression. Therefore, she said, the women's movement had to infiltrate into every factory and village where there were working women, instead of just staying out in the streets. She had especially pointed out that to develop the women's movement, the hard progressive core had to be well equipped with communist ideas—and she laid special emphasis on this.

She gave a detailed explanation as to how best to run the women's movement from then on in diverse conditions—in the guerrilla bases or liberated areas, in enemy-held areas, or in cities such as Hamhung and Chongjin, in mines such as at Aoji, in streets like Ryongdure Street or in schools.

Then someone appeared at the kitchen door. It was Bok Sil, who came back into the room followed by a young man. Producing a slip of paper, the big-eyed young man in home-spun clothes called out in a deep ringing voice:

"I was sent by Comrade Kim Chol Ju."

Mother rose to greet him. She asked him to sit down while she read the note. It was a week old, and informed that 30 miners of Kumchang were on their way to join the guerrillas.

"You must have had a very hard time."

"We are all right."

"I'm not so sure. Early last spring 70 young men from Yenchi were captured and maltreated by Commander Wi's troops, they say. Well, where did you have breakfast?"

"We had it in the village on the other side of the mountain."

"Yours is a big group. It must have been hard for you to get food on your way here."

With her eyes fixed on this reliable-looking young recruit, Mother asked him whether any of them were sick, or had got sore feet, if they had good footwear, and if there were any girls among them. She then instructed Bok Sil to take him down to the village and introduce him to the head of the communications centre there.

As soon as the young man left with Bok Sil, Mother went on with her speech.

Half an hour later, Aunt Bong Ae came into the yard carrying a bronze bowl on a kerchief.

"Look out, Yong Ju, you might fall. What on earth are you doing up there?" She called, looking up at the aspen tree that was just sprouting its first green leaves.

"The magpie has laid eggs."

Yong Ju's robust and dimpled face gazed down at her through the green leaves.

"Laying eggs already? Nonsense, boy! Is your mother still in?"

Without waiting for a reply, she went into the yard, carrying the bowl of medicine carefully so it wouldn't get spilt.

"She doesn't bother about her health, working day and night. And she doesn't take her medicine when she should. How will she get over her illness that way?" she muttered to herself.

Chang Dok's wife came out and put her finger to her lips, to show that Mother was still talking.

"She will need plenty of energy if she wants to go on speaking. Take the medicine in to her—I won't leave unless she takes it."

As Aunt Bong Ae stood in the kitchen, Mother's voice could be heard through the door.

"If we don't take up arms and fight, we will never free our homeland or ourselves. We lose our fathers and our brothers, our sisters and our children. We must fight with arms in hand...."

As time went by, Aunt Bong Ae clasped her clenched fists against her breast and bit her lip. She was deeply worried about

Mother. Whenever she lay down, Mother would moan with pain, but in public she would pretend to be all right. Here she was making fiery speeches, not for just a couple of hours but for several days on end.

The medicine bowl was not returned, and as Aunt Bong Ae could not open the door and tell Mother she must take it right away, all she could do was squat on the kitchen floor and wait in silence.

The sun was already sinking in the west, when a woman came running into the yard. On her back she carried a baby wrapped in a small blanket. Her shoes were covered with red clay which showed that she had come from some far-off region.

"Is Mother in?"

Without waiting for a reply, she threw open the door and went in. Everybody's attention was immediately drawn to her. She dropped on her knees to the floor and cried in a broken voice:

"Mother! Ok Sim is dead. The Japs caught her and...."

Ok Sim was a messenger who had been sent to the Wangching area. On her way back from her parents' home the woman with the baby had seen her body hanging from a lamp-post in the street.

On hearing the story, Mother Kang Ban Sok remained silent for many moments, gazing out of the door. The woman turned her back and wept, covering her face with her hands. Other comrades were crying, too.

Presently, Mother looked around and said.

"We must stop weeping. This is too terrible. We cannot just sit and weep...."

Mother pushed the medicine bowl aside and, still in the grip of profound sorrow, continued her speech from where she had left off.

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Just about the time Comrade Kum Song arrived at the fork road leading to Hsiaoshaho, a young woman in ordinary clothes pushed open the kitchen door of the house in Togijom Valley and stepped out into the yard.

"Be careful," Mother Kang Ban Sok told her quietly.

"I will be."

After bowing, she walked off at a smart pace and soon disappeared into the distance along the mountain trail.

She had to cover several hundred *ri* to get to Namyang on the bank of the Tuman-gang River to give the organizations there news of the day's meeting.

Mother did not return to the house until the messenger had covered the trail and crossed the pass.

She rested a few moments, then pulled up her workbasket from a corner of the room and began sewing.

On her lap lay a man's green coat in which she was making the third button hole. She had intended to finish it that day, to sew on the buttons. It was worrying her that she had made little progress—she had started it a fortnight ago.

After a few stitches, she looked through the window. The low sun in the west shone into the room, throwing a silky oblong on the straw mat. It was still and quiet.

"I do hope she'll be safe..." she muttered to herself. As the days went by, the enemy was becoming more alert; it was getting dangerous to carry even a small slip of paper.

Until the early spring, she had not assigned this task to anyone else; she had done it herself. Now her health no longer allowed her to undertake such assignments.

After working through the whole night long or holding a series of meetings, she felt the weakness catching up on her.

Now Mother felt so dizzy that she tied a kerchief round her head and lay down in the corner of the room.

A few years ago she had had an attack of indigestion. It was worse now, for she could no longer digest her food and always felt nausea. It was the aftereffects of years of poverty and worry. She had done sewing and taken in washing to feed her family. Yet, no one had ever heard her complain of her hard life, not even her children. She had always kept her suffering deep inside her, and had gone around with a smile on her face.

It was not that she gave in meekly to suffering. On the contrary, she fought it with grim determination.

Many times she had crossed the snow-swept hills in blizzards and walked the roads at night. Striding in the rain along field paths covered with dry leaves, she would worry about the future of Korean women; she would spend days on foot to go and teach even one member of the Women's Association.

Her quiet footsteps and cheerful laughter were known all over Paishan and as far afield as Antu.

Fierce waves had dashed at her heart many times, but she could endure every hardship.

One day, when the wild jujube bushes covered the knolls at the foot of Mt. Ponghwa-san, Kim Hyong Jik, her husband, suddenly appeared in the yard with his hands in irons. "I'll be back soon," he told her. She felt as if her heart had stopped as she saw her husband go off along the highway, escorted by the police.

The next time she saw him was at Popyong. He was in bed, his entire body frostbitten. She felt as if her tears were drops of blood. A few years later he died, died too early. Then her brother, Kang Jin Sok, was arrested. After that her brother-in-law, Kim Hyong Gwon.

Her sorrows were too great to soothe with tears. Yet it never broke her spirit. She did not shrink, she stood up undaunted, like a rock by the seashore, against all the fierce winds and stormy waves of the class society.

After resting awhile, she again took up her needlework.

While walking towards home, Comrade Kum Song was going over the coming year's fight in his mind. "The goal is set. Yet obviously many unexpected difficulties will crop up. What will they be, and where and when? It won't be easy to make it to the Amnok-gang River area. Kwantung Army units are scattered all over the country and we may well meet with bandits, too. I wonder how my fledgling guerrillas will make out on this long, dangerous trek. And how will the people greet the guerrillas whom they have never seen before. It won't be easy, either, to form a united front with the Independence Army. We must also join hands with the Chinese Anti-Japanese National-Salvation Army. We had a pretty hard and dangerous time last April when we visited Commander Wi's army, and it's not easy to foresee what dangers will come our way. We must be prepared for bitter, heavy losses if we want to form guerrilla units at many different places at once. Meanwhile, my family is having a pretty tough time."

He had known that his mother's health was getting worse though when, once in a while, he managed to get home Mother always pretended she was well. Perhaps this upset him most of all.

There was Chol Ju, but he was so busy with his Young Communist League activities that he had little time to spend at

home, and Yong Ju, too, was often away. It simply had to be, it was not their fault.

In an endeavour to put aside these worries, he made his thoughts travel back into the past, when he had worked in this vicinity.

Hsinglungtsun was not far from here and Fatzaitun was just over this mountain. In one of the rooms of the low-roofed house at Hsinglungtsun, he used to sit and write; he would prepare a lot of materials for teaching children and young men and women, draft out leaflets and bulletins on the political situation. This village was the centre from which the preparations had been made to form the guerrilla army. He had sat there working through many nights, had sat on a saddle, and many comrades came and went through his door.

He had worked at Huatien, Kirin and after that at Chialun. Then this Sungchiang area had become his main base.

Memories sailed over him like clouds, till Comrade Kum Song was barely aware that he was walking.

He crossed another mountain pass.

He trod along a narrow stream cutting across the Fuerhho road. The setting sun shed its glorious rays on the foot of the mountain. Dark green oak thickets were dotted around, against the lighter green grassy plots embroidered with wild red lilies.

The stream was lined with bending willows which stretched far into a distance, with ash trees standing upright between them here and there.

Tall reeds swayed in the breeze on the barren plateau from whence you could view the whole Togijom Valley.

The stream went into hiding here and there, and farther down was lost deep in the valley. Its waters were so clear that you could trace every detail on the bottom.

Crossing the wooden bridge at the entrance to the village, he saw three familiar cabins.

His eyes alighted on the first one on the right. The yard was deserted. On the wall hung a straw bag and by the kitchen door there was the huge barrel, a familiar sight in every mountain village. A slender wisp of smoke curled upwards from the leaning wooden chimney.

"I wonder how Mother feels at this moment?"

He hoped his brothers would catch sight of him, but nobody was in sight.

As Mother put the finishing touches to the last button hole the evening glow reflected on the window panes was deepening into shades of purple. That meant her needlework was done now. She spread the tunic and trimmed loose threads off the seams.

There were footsteps outside and she heard the kitchen door open. Presently there was the sound of pails clanking against the threshold of the door and then the footsteps died away.

She thought it must be Yong Ju. Whether playing outside or going on an errand, he would always come home before meal to make up the fire under the oven and fetch the water. Smoothing out the finished work with careful strokes Mother fell deep into thought. While his brothers were busy with their revolutionary activities, Yong Ju tried hard to help her with the household work, though no one had ever asked him to. She was proud of her youngest son, yet in a way deeply sorry for him.

Again there were steps in the yard. Maybe someone from the next house going down to the village.

Some minutes later she heard a faint footstep from the direction of the entrance to the village. Listening absent-mindedly, she suddenly jumped to her feet and pushed open the door. Her son was coming down the lane beyond the iris swamp.

"I thought it was him," she said.

She folded the clothes and put them away in a hurry, and then clung for support to the door handle.

Comrade Kum Song was already running across the yard towards her. This was the way Mother would always receive her eldest son, even if it were midnight. Usually she would go out into the yard, but now she stood on the porch to receive his greetings. He immediately took her arm and went into the room and seated her at the warmer end of the heated floor. He took off his tunic, hung it on the wall and looked round the room. The neatly plastered walls, and the ceiling, the straw mat kept clean by his beloved mother, the shelf supporting the papered chest of drawers, with cotton-covered quilts placed on top; everything was exactly the same. Yet, there was something bleak about it. The paper on the door with the peephole that Chol Ju had made had yellowed, and the quilt on the chest of drawers, the green one his father used to use, was faded. On one end of the shelf was the kerosene box with the Pine trademark, its top now fitted with a lock. This, too, Chol Ju must have done. There was the square table covered with a sheet of white paper by the

front door, with a few books piled up neatly. Simple as they were, all these things carried the gentle touch of Mother's hand.

Comrade Kum Song sat opposite Mother.

"How do you feel, Mother?"

"All right. I feel quite strong these days...."

Laughing, Mother quickly hid under the pillow the kerchief that she had taken off her head before she went out to meet her son.

Comrade Kum Song noticed that she was trying to avoid any mention of her illness, but looking at her, he became still more worried.

Mother was dressed in white. He watched her and studied her face carefully. He was surprised at how much she had aged. Her smiling eyes which sparkled with tenderness and kindness remained unchanged, but there were faint bluish shadows under her eyes. Her nose looked sharper than before and wrinkles gathered round her softly closed lips. Her thin hair was already greying a little at the temples. Everything about her pointed to aging and declining health, and Comrade Kum Song turned away quickly.

Seeing what was in his mind, she quietly smoothed the hair round her ears and smiled.

"I don't look well? Don't worry. I didn't sleep much last night because I had something to do. You look fit and well."

"Mother, I'm quite fit as you see. But I'm afraid your illness has got worse, hasn't it?" He leaned closer and looked at her, full in the face.

"You always talk like that when you see me. I just feel a little weak. You couldn't call it illness. Everyone falls ill sometimes. There is no one who doesn't. And I was lying down, because I had to go out last night and I felt a little tired."

He changed the subject and talked about Chol Ju, so as not to cause her anxiety.

Mother said Chol Ju had gone about a month ago and had not come back yet. He was always away on some assignment for the Young Communist League.

In her endeavour to alleviate his worry, she began to praise Yong Ju for taking some of the domestic chores off her shoulders, while doing all his work in the Children's Corps.

"He is always more than eager to help me, however late he comes home from his liaison errands, even if it's midnight. He

says he can't sleep if I'm left alone at home. He's just gone to draw some water."

"Yong Ju is a big boy now."

"If he were older, it would be another thing, but he is still so young, you know.... Wait here a minute."

She got up, leaning on her knee. If she sat for long, she thought, he would most certainly see through her and know that it was illness that had made her lie down. She felt sharp pains in all her joints, and moved a step with great difficulty. Then there was a sound at the kitchen door of someone coming in.

"Is that you, Yong Ju? Your brother has come."

"I saw him from the well. I wanted to call out but I didn't." said a voice which was as lively as the look on his face. Then there was the sound of the pails bumping against the doorstep, followed by the sound of water splashing over.

"Brother, you've come?"

As Mother pushed open the door, Yong Ju bent his close-cropped head, the yoke still across his shoulders. His sleeves were rolled up to the elbows and the front of his unlined jacket was soaking wet.

Comrade Kum Song hurried into the kitchen and lifted up the buckets.

"How are you? These are too heavy for you. You shouldn't draw too much water in one go...."

"Water isn't heavy. The shoulder straps perhaps are a bit loose."

"Yes, they are. They're right for Chol Ju. You should have fixed them."

Comrade Kum Song picked up the pails and poured the water into the barrel. When he turned around, Yong Ju held his brother's waist in a tight grasp. Comrade Kum Song put his arms round his younger brother and hugged him, patting the top of his head. Yong Ju looked old enough to understand what was going on around him, but whenever he saw his eldest brother after a long separation, Yong Ju would always play the baby like this.

Yong Ju hung onto his brother's waist with trembling hands still tighter and rubbed his head against his chest.

After a long pause, Yong Ju looked steadily at his brother and said: "Brother!"

A tear welled up in Mother's eye as she watched the brothers' affectionate reunion, and looked away.

Comrade Kum Song took his brother's hand and led him out into a corner of the yard. There was a bench made of two stakes driven into the earth with a wooden board fixed across them. He put his hand on his young brother's shoulder and they sat down together.

A tiny flower garden, with golden bells and azaleas in full bloom along the border, faced the bench against the background of a strangely shaped rock with many holes on it. The balsam, cockscombs and portulaca in the foreground were not yet in bloom.

"Yong Ju, how is Mother these days?" Comrade Kum Song asked abruptly, after chatting about a few things and several other questions.

Yong Ju turned to gaze at his brother, before he answered.

"Mother says she is quite well now."

"Quite well?"

"Yes."

Comrade Kum Song knew of her illness, but his younger brother, too, seemed to be trying not to worry him.

"Does she still walk long distances to do work with the Women's Association?"

"No, she doesn't. People come to her. There were two today."

"Is that so?"

As dusk approached, a cool breeze began to blow. Maize stalks with their sparse leaves swayed to and fro and frogs croaked in the iris swamp.

A few more questions drew the truth from Yong Ju. With tears in his eyes, he told his brother that Mother had asked him never to tell anyone that she was ill.

A heavy silence followed.

Comrade Kum Song could easily imagine it, but having been told of the truth, he again felt depressed and gazed in silence at the darkening mountains.

"Brother, do you know the teacher at the community school at Chang Village on the way to Wangching?" asked Yong Ju, changing the subject. Silence was not easy for him.

"That's more than 200 *ri* from here. Who is he?"

"Don't you know him? He is called Paek Gwang Myong, I think."

"Well, I've probably met him, but I'm not sure.... Why do you ask?"

"He says he knows Brother Chol Ju very well. He has a relative here in this village. Every time he comes here, he says he wants to see you. I met him again today. He said he came here yesterday."

"Did he? Why does he want to see me?"

"He says he has something to tell you."

"Yong Ju!" Mother was calling him.

"Take this water to your brother to wash."

"All right."

Bringing a basin and a towel, Yong Ju asked, "Brother, you won't be going away again soon, I hope?"

"Why?" he turned his head while dipping his hands into the warm water.

"I've got to go down to the village with a message."

Yong Ju knew that he might leave at any moment, and was afraid he might not be there when he got back at night.

"Don't worry. Go and take your message."

"You'll wait, even if I'm a bit late, won't you?"

Blinking his eyes, he waited for his brother's assurance, when Mother said in a tone of mild remonstrance, "Oh, get along with you! Don't be so impolite to your eldest brother."

Yong Ju chuckled and quickly disappeared behind the house.

Comrade Kum Song went into the room and squatted down beside the table.

There were the sounds of dry twigs cracking and a pot boiling in the kitchen.

Presently a fragrant smell of freshly boiled vegetables floated through the open door.

He leafed through the books on the table. They included *How to Raise Chickens*, *A Tale of Chunhyang* and *Workers' Reader*. *How to Raise Chickens* was new to him. Opening the cover, he found that it was Maxim Gorky's *Mother*. He was certain that the cover had been replaced by Chol Ju. The book was very worn.

Late that night, when Yong Ju got back, the family sat round the table.

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"How to Raise Chickens is almost worn out, Mother."

Dinner was over, and he sat facing Mother, deep in conversation.

Yong Ju was so tired after his long run that he could hardly keep his eyes open at dinner; he was now dozing, with his head on his brother's lap.

"The book came by post from Kirin. That was five years ago now. So many people have read it. Quite a few housewives, too. It went the rounds and to the village across the mountain. Then Yong Ju got it back to read himself. Chol Ju put that cover on it some time ago."

She had forgotten her tiredness and was mending her son's underwear. She resumed the thread of her conversation.

"I think the last part of the novel leaves something to be desired. But it's a good book. It gives you courage, you feel as if you have got to know another neighbour.... You know I often talk to this old woman who was so under the thumb of her drunken husband. She shed tears very often, but not because she was weak."

She twisted the end of the cotton to thread the needle and raised her face lost in thought. Comrade Kum Song felt his heart was torn when he learned that Mother talked to the heroine of the novel.

Looking at her gentle eyes, he said softly:

"While in Fusung, you told me that the last part of the novel left something to be desired. You think so because you want to fight on."

"I don't remember now. I just wanted to see her carry on a struggle, instead of being arrested at the end of the story."

"You are right, Mother. I think at that time the author couldn't write it any other way for some unavoidable reasons. There must have been some limitations in the ideological development of the heroine as well as in the author himself. It can't be helped because the story was written nearly thirty years ago. How inspiring it would have been, as you said, if

the novel had dealt with her struggle later on. For that, another volume has to be written."

"Perhaps, we expect too much. Well, the author is still alive, isn't he?"

"Why, you know everything, Mother. How do you know that?"

"The ear is a great treasure, as they say. That young man from Namyang told me so last spring."

She always called Han Hung Su that because he was from Namyang. Sewing up a tear on the vest sleeve, Mother told him the story of Han Hung Su's illness.

She always praised him. She said Han Hung Su was very polite, always neat and tidy and very kindhearted for his age. Then she mimicked Han Hung Su calling "Mother, Mother" like a little child when he lost consciousness.

Comrade Kum Song joined in her laughter.

"I still feel sorry for him. He was so ill and he left here before he had fully recovered. I was so worried when he had gone. My conscience told me I shouldn't have let him go. Yong Ju, are you asleep already? Well, spread out your quilt and sleep. You are giving your brother a hard time, little one."

Yong Ju had been half listening to their conversation, half dozing with his head on his brother's lap.

"Let him be. I'll put him to bed when he's gone off to sleep."

Stroking his little brother's head, he went on:

"Comrade Han is very worried about your illness. He wanted to come here with me, but circumstances didn't allow him. He came with me quite a way and asked me to give you his best wishes."

"How kindhearted he is! He sent me some medicine again around the 15th of last month."

"Medicine?"

Comrade Kum Song had not known this, and felt deeply grateful to Han Hung Su for his consideration in not letting him know about his devoted care for Mother.

"Oh, by the way, I received parcels from three places. They all contained medicines. But I don't know which is from whom. So I've not yet written to thank the senders."

"It's impossible to know who they are from, because they all used false names on the parcels." The hand patting the head of his sleeping brother gently came to a stop. He pictured

in his mind each of his comrades-in-arms with whom he had made the revolutionary pledge and parted that night in a blizzard. Scattered over a vast wilderness now, they were the old comrades-in-arms to whom he was bound by comradeship and the same ideology, as if by ties of blood. How he longed to see them!

"I'd like to get some more copies of the pamphlet that explains the four policies proposed at the Chialun Meeting. How can I get hold of them?" Mother asked, putting some oil in the lamp. The night was by now far advanced.

"The guerrilla army is going to set up a press department."

"That's another matter. I need them very badly now. All the Women's Association members qualified for party membership must read it. We only have a few copies and they will take an awfully long time to get round. I think I'll have to get them together to copy a few pages each."

She bit the thread and picked up a button.

"Now the guerrilla army has come into being, the women have so many things to do. But I'm worried because things aren't going all that well. They've got to provide the guerrillas with uniforms, prepare their food and work at home in place of husbands in the army, you see? Oh, I sent Yong Suk to you the other day. Did you meet her? She is an honest girl though maybe a bit raw—she had no chance to learn like the other women."

He remembered Pak Hung Dok's report that Yong Suk was very popular among the women in Liangkang Village.

He said with a smile:

"Yes. Comrade Yong Suk is a full-fledged guerrilla now. She'll get her education on the way, I'm sure."

"That's good," she said. "Now that we women have taken up arms, we've made a big stride forward. So far, our movement has been confined to doing away with illiteracy, to opposing early and forced marriages and stamping out superstition. Now we women can have our rightful share in the revolution."

There was a look of satisfaction on her face as she gazed into the distance for a moment. Whatever ordeals she faced in life she always looked to the future with high hopes and faced life resolutely.

With unbounded reverence Comrade Kum Song regarded

his mother who now had such a lively expression that it made her look quite young again.

"Oh, I'm sorry. You must be quite exhausted after your long journey. Put Yong Ju down there and go to sleep."

She looked around to find him a pillow.

"Never mind, I'm not a bit tired. Stop working and go to sleep yourself. You've been sitting up a long time."

"No, I had a sleep during the day. Since I always lie down, sitting like this is as good as resting for me. Now, then, put Yong Ju to bed."

Mother handed him the pillow. He stretched out his hands to take it so as not to inconvenience her. Catching sight of Mother's hands, his own hands stopped momentarily in mid-air.

Mother had already started stitching the edge of the sleeve. However, he could not tear his eyes from her hands. These rough, thin hands with swollen knuckles were quite different from the hands he remembered from his childhood.

When Mother used to go to the bank of the Taedong-gang River to do the washing, he would follow her. Before returning home, she always washed his face. In those days her hands were white and soft, and when she cupped her hand not a drop of water fell through. His family moved to Chunggang and then to Fusung. Even then there had been no gaps between her fingers. And when he was moving to Huatien he had seen Mother's hands while she helped him carry the bundles. Even then they had not been so crooked and coarse as now.

He was shocked to the core to see her hands, though he knew why they looked so awful. It could be said that her hands were so unsightly because she had supported her family with them and fought her way through this thorny world. Still it was painful to watch them. With those hands she had ploughed the land, picked up stones and pulled up weeds. She had worked so hard that many a washing stick had worn out and many a needle worn blunt. And all too often she had used those hands to tighten her belt to endure her hunger.

Gazing for a time at Mother's face and hands in the lamp-light, Comrade Kum Song said softly.

"Mother, stop your mending and go to sleep. You've had a hard life. Once our homeland is liberated, we must make sure that our mothers rest on a warm seashore...."

Then her hands would become soft again, he wanted to

say but didn't, for he feared to upset her. His eyes became dim as if these unuttered words had been cut into his own heart.

Mother paused in her work and looked up at her son. She too had something weighing heavily on her mind. She had been feeling very sick for the last few days, scarcely able to eat a thing. This evening she could not avoid eating with the son with whom she was reunited after such a long time. So she had forced herself to eat a few mouthfuls with great effort, and now she was feeling worse.

She took great care that he should not notice it.

As she folded up her work, Mother tried to be as cheerful as possible.

"Now stop talking about what you call illness. Tell me stories that will give me inspiration. When will your guerrilla army return?"

"I'm afraid we won't be back for a year."

"If you manage to see Mr. Chu, give him my regards."

She meant Commander Chu Ho Rim of the Independence Army.

"I'm planning to negotiate with the Independence Army. So I'll meet Mr. Chu come what may."

"Better do, if you can. Your father talked about him often."

"Our policy is to ally ourselves with the Independence Army."

"Even in that army there are good people. Some time ago I visited a place 50 *ri* away from here. I happened to hear a lecture there delivered by a man with long unkempt hair. He belonged to what they called the group to rebuild the Communist Party! Shaking his 'ism-styled' hair and waving his clenched fist, this man made a speech in which he seemed to be hitting out at everything. He said that the Independence Army was like a worn-out plough which must be broken up and then thrown into a cauldron and melted down. The audience began to leave their seats in twos and threes. Of course. There must have been quite a few former members of the Independence Army and their children among that audience, I should think."

"That's just what the Japanese imperialists want, so that we Koreans don't become united."

"It's appalling the way the very people who claim to be dedicated to communism just don't understand what unity is about."

"The Korean communist movement was destroyed by these sectarians. And we face tremendous difficulties now because we have to start again from scratch."

"You are right."

Their conversation wandered over such a wide range of subjects that they barely noticed the night was far advanced.

Having tidied up around her and folded the underwear, Mother took her son's tunic from the wall to see if it needed mending. She spotted a button dangling from a thread.

"This button could fall off any moment."

"We fought a battle not so long ago. Maybe that's why."

"What do you mean by a battle?"

He told her how his men had ambushed a Japanese horse cart convoy.

Her hands stopped moving as she listened attentively to his story.

She smiled and her face brightened.

They talked on and on.

The conversation turned to the guerrilla army, how to expand and strengthen it, to the immediate tasks for women revolutionaries, and to the Japanese aggression in China and its ultimate consequences. So the conversation passed from a loose button to the possibility of war in Europe; it drifted to the prophecy that the vast, still slumbering continent of Africa, chopped and devoured by the imperialists would one day rise and like an angry lion turn on the aggressor. Then it turned to their home village of Mangyongdae where their relatives were still living, and to other personal matters.

At times their talk harked back far into the past or raced ahead into the distant future. How wonderful it would be when Korea became an independent socialist country. The mere thought of it brightened them and made them forget all their troubles! There would be no oppression, no exploitation. Everyone would have the chance to learn and the chance to get a job, and to rest would be a duty, too. They would have free medical care. Old people would be the most respected and children would have the best of everything.

Mother had heard this story long ago from her husband at Mangyongdae.

The talk between mother and son spread far and wide, carrying joys and sorrows, like a ripple on the surface of a lake.

Though they touched on so many subjects, both sad and

gay, they carefully avoided mention of his two uncles, Kim Hyong Gwon and Kang Jin Sok, who were now behind bars in Seoul.

For though both wanted to talk about them more than anything else, neither dared mention them lest it should bring to the surface all the mutual anxieties.

Comrade Kum Song had tried hard to get news of his two uncles. He had scoured the papers for trial reports and made many inquiries through travellers.

Kang Jin Sok, his uncle on his mother's side, had been condemned to 15 years' penal servitude at West Gate Prison. He was now serving his ninth year and carrying on the fight in prison. It had been said that he had become so emaciated now that he could barely stand.

Kim Hyong Gwon had been sentenced to 15 years' penal servitude together with other members of the Revolutionary Army.

Through her own sources, Mother was as well informed as her son.

The first cock crowed.

Mother suddenly lifted her face and asked:

"Won't you show me the guerrillas?"

"The guerrillas?"

Their eyes met. She made this request after much hesitation. Because the guerrillas would soon be going into battle and she was not feeling well. Her son understood why. Yet he too hesitated before replying. As there was no prompt reply, she added in an entreating voice.

"I want to see our army with my own eyes."

"Why not?" he said reluctantly. For he worried about her health.

"Shall I be able to go and see them tomorrow?" she asked, light-hearted at her son's reply.

"You'll see them tomorrow or the day after."

"Why not tomorrow?"

Mother's penetrating eyes sparkled. These eyes were more expressive than dozens of words. He could read her mind and again felt something hot surging up within him.

"You must give me a little time because I have to send a message."

Some of his troops were going to be at Liangkiang and he was thinking of transferring one platoon to Funghsan Village.

"Why send a message? I can go and see myself."

"There's something I must do. Did Chol Ju say when he would come?"

"Nobody can tell. Yong Ju told me of Chol Ju's plan; he is planning to form a large guerrilla unit and to join you soon."

"I'm sure he will. When he decides to do a thing, he does it."

"You met the miners from Kumchang, didn't you?"

"Yes, I did. They were assigned to the Antu Company."

As if looking back on the bygone days, Mother gazed at her son for some moments, before she said quietly.

"Chol Ju's spirits are sky-high, I think."

The night was giving way to the first light of dawn and the stars were blinking drowsily and palely. Insects hummed fastidiously in the flower garden.

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Next day Comrade Kum Song sent a message to Fungshan Village where the guerrilla unit was expected, and then went up the mountain with Yong Ju. Young as he was, Yong Ju was used to cutting wood, and as skilled as any grown-up woodsman. He had made an A-frame carrier for himself to fit his body. The tops of the carrier were wound with rope to tie the wood. He was walking ahead of his brother, carrying a sickle. He was only ten but he looked much older. The rosy-cheeked boy climbed the slope in high spirits, occasionally glancing over his shoulder at his brother.

It had been a big headache getting firewood the winter before. True, the family had never had too much firewood, but they had had a particularly hard time last winter because even Chol Ju had seldom been at home.

Whenever Yong Ju came down from the mountain with a bundle of firewood slung across his back, Mother would be standing by the roadside to blow on his frozen hands.

"The mountain is covered with trees, but we have no firewood and I'm making you go to all this trouble, my son," she would say.

Then he would answer her as if he were already grown-up.

"Why do you always come here? I'm not cold. It's you who are getting cold, Mother."

At these words Mother would feel still sorrier and turn away her eyes full of tears.

Their log cabin was so loosely built that it swallowed up in a single day all the firewood little Yong Ju could fetch in two journeys. Even though he was working hard in the Children's Corps, Yong Ju had made a point of fetching firewood every day. The young men in the village had felt sorry for him and brought firewood to the house themselves several times. But Mother had been against their helping her because they had plenty of work to do for their organizations.

Looking at his dependable young brother from behind Comrade Kum Song was caught up in thought.

"If I leave home this time, I can't tell when I'll be back. Not for months maybe, not for several years, many years, even. Then, the little one will have to shoulder heavy burdens in my place. Plenty of big troubles are ahead of him. As for me, I shall have my own trials to face on my way to the Amnok-gang River. Hardships await my whole family and me in the revolutionary struggle. The firewood cut today and tomorrow won't last long maybe. Food is a big problem, too. It's getting warmer now so firewood won't be such a problem. But how will they fill their stomachs during the long summer days?"

By the time he had chewed over all these worries, he was already half way up the mountain.

Yong Ju put down his A-frame carrier. He ran his eyes over a thicket and started work right away with his sickle.

Comrade Kum Song slipped off his tunic, hung it on the branch of an alder tree and rolled up his shirt sleeves. Sickle in his hand, he looked round, but could find no suitable firewood to cut. Birches, hazels, bush clovers and alders there were plenty. But they were still too young, and could only be used as kindling.

Yong Ju was cutting bush clover a few paces away. He was mowing them down right and left. Having known what it was to be very short of firewood he seemed hell-bent on gathering as much as possible while his brother was still at home. He was so elated he could have cleared the whole mountain.

"Yong Ju, they are not good enough for firewood."

"Mother said thin branches are better than thick ones."

"That is because she thought the thick ones would be harder for you. Now let's cut a whole lot. Where are the dried-up stuff?"

After some discussion, the brothers decided to cut *shui* shrub.

Comrade Kum Song grasped the tops of the branches and slashed the lower part with great sweeps. The sharp slender sickle blade extending from the long handle made of cork-tree wood cut well. At every hard diagonal blow, the trees went down. The hard, tenacious shrubs were conquered step by step. Drops of resin oozed from the stumps.

As the dense shrubs were mowed down on one side, various frail grasses hidden in their shadow were exposed to the sun. They had pushed their way up through the dark, moist grass of yesteryear and were barely managing to hold up their still sparse leaves. There were bracken leaves as big as a baby's arms, swallowtails which looked so enticingly tender that one felt an urge to eat them as they were, the lanky buds of *sapju* plants, *durup* shoots which seemed ready to bud at any moment, stray asters and valerians which had overrun other plants, and many others.

A wonderfully fresh and pleasant smell, the early summer fragrance of the mountain, lingered over the earth and grass.

Sometimes wild roses and bindweed vines creeping over the *shui* shrubwood gave off the heavy scent of honey. Bees of all shapes and sizes heavy with pollen were buzzing about. Some were very hairy, others amazingly short and fat. A few bees fell and rolled about on the ground, apparently weighed down by their load or maybe just intoxicated by the powerful scent.

Having made a clearing a few metres in diameter, drops of sweat rolled down Comrade Kum Song's forehead. He straightened up, and looking back, wiped his face with his kerchief.

Yong Ju picked up the branches that had been felled and piled them up. His face aglow, Yong Ju was on the go all the time. He, too, no doubt, felt hot for he took off his coat. At every turn, his sickle dangled at his side. His straw sandals were obviously too big for him. As Comrade Kum Song looked at his brother, who at the tender age of ten had already tasted the bitterness of the world, he felt the tears ready to well up in his eyes and his heart warmed to him.

"Is there a spring near here, Yong Ju?"

"There's one over there. I'll fetch some water for you."

"Better go to the spring and drink."

They crossed a hillock and saw a big rock bulging out some distance away. Under the rock there was a spring. It was only a tiny one, the size of a gourd ladle. In the cavity of the rock there was a hole so small that one could stop it with one finger. The water was welling out of a crack in the rock and trickling down a fosse, ripples gently gliding on its surface.

"They say the water will never dry up because it flows down from Mt. Paekdu-san. It does not freeze in winter."

"Really?!"

He looked down the water which was softly trickling out. It seemed to him that something flashed across the surface. His father's face. It had been a momentary glimpse, but the image had been quite clear just the same. He felt a pang of deep sorrow when it disappeared leaving the blue water clear.

He had been thinking for some time that soon it would be June 5, the sixth anniversary of his father's death. After drinking some water he wiped his mouth with his kerchief, and said:

"We had a spring just like this at Mangyongdae."

"Did you?"

Yong Ju's eyes flashed in surprise.

"Yes. About halfway down Mangyong-bong Hill to the Taedong-gang River there was a spring just like this. Every morning Father would take me there. I would wash my face and hands, and Father would give himself a cold rubdown with a wet towel. What is the matter? You haven't had a single mouthful of water."

Comrade Kum Song was surprised that his reference to his father should have given such a shock to the boy.

He blinked his sparkling eyes a few times and said sadly:

"Oh, I wish I could go to Mangyongdae."

Under this simple wish lay hidden a great longing. Born in a land foreign to his family, Yong Ju had never seen his native village. Reading his feelings, Comrade Kum Song said firmly:

"Yes, we'll go to our homeland. We'll soon drive the Japanese out and go there. We'll live with Mother in our own village. Then she will feel better."

These words seemed to cheer up Yong Ju; he flung himself flat on the ground and drank large draughts of water as if he wanted to dry up the spring.

"Oh, how fresh the water is!" He exclaimed with a smile, wiping his wet chin with the back of his hand.

Down below, enchantingly green mountain chains with their ridges and valleys undulated into the far distance and the blue water of a stream wound its way through the villages and foothills like a serpent. A few wisps of white cloud floated across the pale blue sky. And an eagle with outstretched wings wheeled among the clouds.

In the golden light of the early summer sun the young green grass and woods glistened. There was complete silence except for the chirping of grasshoppers, which only emphasized the silence. Now, sitting on the mountainside where the air was always fresh and sweet, he seemed to have left all his worries behind, if only for the moment. Houses were scattered in the valley along the stream like matchboxes.

He could pick out washing hung out to dry in the yard of a house, and a woman standing there as if waiting for someone.

Probably Mother was waiting for them like that.

He went back to his work.

It was noon and warm steam was rising up from the earth. The veins on his arms stood out and beads of perspiration rolled down to his wrists.

In the afternoon he started bundling up the wood. Yong Ju brought the cut branches and shrubs while Comrade Kum Song stamped on them and tied them up with rope in such tight bundles that you couldn't even stick your finger in. The thick arrowroot rope snapped several times before he'd finished.

There were fifteen bundles in all. He put four on the A-frame carrier, a bulky load. Carrying it on his back he went down and had reached a little mound, when a solitary elm tree caught his eye. It stood on a flat grassy plot large enough to accommodate a log cabin. Gripped by a strange feeling, he paused a moment and looked up at the treetop high above. A bleak, desolate feeling came over him. He walked past the spot and on down to the village.

As he had expected, Mother stood waiting by the roadside and helped Yong Ju carry his load.

At this moment he saw a woman coming up from the stream, carrying a washtub on her head. She was Aunt Kim Bong Ae whom he had known since the days at Sungchiang. When she had time she would come and help Mother with her household

chores, doing washing, tidying the kitchen or preparing medicines for her.

Aunt Kim Bong Ae put the washtub on the ground and bowed to him politely.

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Once again his family was sitting round the dinner table. The rice was mixed with foxtail millet. There were bowls of bean-paste soup, a stew and a dish of grilled bull trout. Comrade Kum Song was surprised to find this rare dish.

After taking a few mouthfuls, he asked Mother where she had got the bull trout.

She paused for a moment.

Presently her face turned away, she said: "Oh, that's nothing. And eat your fill of rice with water."

After another pause she went on: "Your brothers are so concerned about you, you know. They took about a month to catch those bull trout."

"A month?"

"Yes. They started fishing after the thaw set in. They said you were away, having a very hard time, and they had nothing special to make you happy, when you returned home. So one day they caught a couple of bull trout and carried them home with a pussy willow switch through their gills. Sometimes they came home empty-handed.... Then they were so down in the dumps that I felt sorry for them. They had so little time they only went fishing once every three or four days, or five or six even. They managed to catch fifteen or so fish in all, including little ones no bigger than your finger. You must take them all to make your brothers happy." Mother's voice was quite calm as she said this, but her lips showed a suspicion of a quiver.

He stopped eating and looked at Yong Ju. He was quite unconcerned, eating up his share of the rice mixed with water.

He had always known that his younger brothers loved him dearly, but as the days went by, he felt sorry for them even more deeply.

"You caught them, so you must eat them with me. Come on."

He pushed the dish towards Yong Ju. Yong Ju pushed it back.

"We ate some every time we caught them."

"Yes, we did," said Mother. Her eyes were moist and she got to her feet and went out into the kitchen with a water bowl.

Comrade Kum Song wanted to stop eating, but ate up his bowlful of rice and all the bull trout with difficulty.

Soon after dinner Kim Chang Dok, a neighbour, dropped in to see him. He was an active veteran organizer for the area. Because his house was some way off at the foot of the mountain, they had sometimes met there when setting up the guerrilla army; it had also at one time been used as a communications centre.

Comrade Kum Song knew him very well. They exchanged warm greetings. Kim Chang Dok was thirty now. He was passionate but calm, ambitious and broad-minded. When the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army was formed at Fatzaitun not far from here, he hadn't attended the ceremony because he was ill. He had been very sorry to miss it. He told Comrade Kum Song that he had seen him coming down the mountain with firewood, and he was most sorry about failing to look after the family. But he was so busy with his revolutionary assignments that he just couldn't find the time.

Their conversation soon turned on what aid could be given to the guerrillas. While they were talking, they heard footsteps outside.

Yong Ju went out to see who it was. He came back and told his brother that the Mr. Paek he had mentioned the day before, had arrived.

Comrade Kum Song had to postpone this talk. Kim Chang Dok left, and a man wearing eye-glasses stepped upon the porch.

"Could I have a word with you?"

Comrade Kum Song stepped outside to usher him in.

"Please come in."

"I'm happy to see you, and I'm very sorry to arrive so unexpectedly."

Paek Gwang Myong took off his glasses and bowed reverently.

When he had sat down, he introduced himself and explained why he had come.

Paek Gwang Myong said bluntly that he came from a rich peasant family. He said that he had a fair tract of land and an orchard and that his father ran a modest distillery in Ryongdure Street. As he was rich, he had studied literature at a college in Seoul. Riding on the waves of the times he became sympathetic with socialism and had now resolved to dedicate himself to this cause. He had left home and was now living in lodgings. While teaching some forty village children, he had been reading Marxist literature in his spare time to broaden his world outlook.

Then he explained that he had first met Comrade Chol Ju at Chang Village, and had later visited him here, at his home, on several occasions.

In fact, greatly influenced by Comrade Chol Ju, Paek Gwang Myong had gradually found himself on the side of the revolution. One day he happened to hear that it was Chol Ju's brother, Comrade Kum Song, who had founded the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army. So Paek Gwang Myong had decided to see him at all costs, and once or twice a month he had come to this place, travelling more than 200 *ri*.

"May I smoke?"

After a moment's hesitation, he took out a packet of *Macaw* cigarettes.

An important subject was on the tip of his tongue but he hesitated before raising it.

Smiling broadly, Comrade Kum Song invited him to smoke if he wished and placed an ashtray in front of him.

Paek Gwang Myong wore silver-rimmed spectacles and was dressed in a single-breasted light-coloured woolen suit. He had a rather long neck and a thin face. At a glance he looked unusually sensitive but he was a gentle and good-natured man. His calm meditative eyes, behind the thick lenses, clearly revealed him as a typical intellectual.

He put the cigarette between his lips, inhaled deeply and blew a few puffs of smoke out before talking slowly.

"The purpose of my sudden visit today is to ask you for guidance. I'm at the crossroads. Excuse me for plunging into the subject right away. But to me it is important, even decisive."

"Don't stand on ceremony, Mr. Paek. From what you've said, you seem to be following the right path."

Since he had noticed Paek's anxiety right from the start,

Comrade Kum Song laughed cheerfully and talked light-heartedly, in an endeavour to put him at his ease.

Pushing up his spectacles with one hand, Paek Gwang Myong went on to say: "No, I'm not sure I agree. You must be quite frank with me, for a man's whole destiny is at stake. Even if the reply hurts me to the quick, I want it to be firm and outright. Let me explain a little more. As I've said, I'm the son of a rich peasant who lives on other people's sweat. I'm a college graduate and, to do something useful for my country, I'm teaching children. I teach them the Korean alphabet and mathematics, too. But unfortunately I'm quite unqualified to cultivate the human spirit, more particularly, the Korean spirit, aren't I? You might not like me, but that's the kind of person I am. So do please try to understand."

Paek Gwang Myong stopped to clear his throat several times. Wiping his lips he went on: "Even at this moment, when I say 'I', 'Paek Gwang Myong', I don't know which 'I' I mean. I'm that sort of person. That may sound rather pedantic, but that's how it is. I'll give you a typical example.

"Not long ago, the Japanese mounted a 'large-scale punitive operation' against Big Valley and killed several hundred innocent Koreans, among them the father and mother of a ten-year-old boy called Chojjae. He barely escaped alive and came to my village to live with relations of his mother. He attends my school. Several days ago, I punished him severely. I had to cane him because he had hit a boy named Sang Hun with his fists and made his nose bleed. Sang Hun, a year younger than he, wiped the blood off with the back of his hand and chased Chojjae to Pisok Street in the next village. When he got to the village, Chojjae gave him another beating. That's what they said. They fought so hard that Policeman Pak at the substation sent a message through the headman of Pisok Street demanding that I educate my children in a proper manner. Angrily, I asked Chojjae what had happened. He said Sang Hun was so naughty that he beat him, in this way provoking the fight. I lashed his calves until I had broken five switches, to stop him doing the same again. But Chojjae stood perfectly still and would not say he was wrong. That really infuriated me. So I whipped him still more fiercely. And as I beat him, I said: 'Do you know why your father and mother were burnt to death in the "punitive operation" in Big Valley? Why do you beat your friend like that? What will come of you? You behave like a little savage....'

Finally he collapsed, shouting out: 'You bourgeois! My parents were killed by the likes of you.' He burst into tears, calling for his mother. His words had a greater effect on me than my beating did on him. I whipped his calves with switches, but he smashed me right on the head with a pole. You know what happened next? There was a Children's Corps member named Myong Gi. He confided in me that the Anti-Imperialist League had wanted an urgent message to be conveyed to Pisok Street and that the job had been assigned to Chojjae and Sang Hun. He said that they had put up that little scene as cover against the police. I hit children and children have to hide things from me...."

Paek Gwang Myong took off his glasses and wiped away the beads of cold sweat on his forehead. The blue veins on his temples pulsated convulsively. He could not control his agitation. His ego had convinced him that this was the great moment when his destiny would be decided. He felt he need not hesitate in front of Comrade Kum Song.

"In my opinion, a teacher should bring up young people to be spirited. This is most essential for us, who do not own our own country.

"The teacher who cannot do this is like a lamp without a wick, a bullet without a snap cap. You might just as well call him a hypocrite. Up to now, I have lamented the ruin of our nation, preached patriotism and advocated Korean independence. However, patriotism, independence and homeland without a true spirit have turned me into an anachronistic fool. Chojjae was right when he said, 'You are bourgeois.' I am bourgeois. 'You are a slave without a country.' That, too, is true. I am bourgeois and a stateless slave. These two Paek Gwang Myongs fight a bloody battle every day. At this very moment these two incompatible egos are fighting with swords. One is ice, the other is fire. They are right in my heart. The fire tries to melt the ice, the ice to quench the fire. This is how it is. How can I go on? I'm living with this horrible contradiction. It is cruel and unreal, it is frightening."

He had completely lost control, and sat there cursing and condemning no one in particular, and heaving sighs of grief and sorrow.

"Mr. Paek!" said Comrade Kum Song, politely, intimately. He knew that Paek Gwang Myong's problem was a problem that many Korean intellectuals faced.

As his firm voice rang through the room, Paek Gwang Myong put out his cigarette and sat up straight.

"I can well understand what you've said. And your rather complex state of mind is also understandable. I think you are right in saying that you are writhing in agony at the cross-roads. And no one but yourself has recognized it. That is important, because it is you that recognized this contradiction, and it is you yourself who see it as urgent, you who need to solve it at all costs. There is no denying that solving such a contradiction will cost much anguish of mind. As you pointed out, it may be a bloody battle. But, however painful, it must be solved. It is not only necessary for you, but for our revolution. Why? Because this is a serious problem; it is not your problem alone, it is a problem that faces many Korean intellectuals. So let's be frank and get down to this problem in real earnest. It's little use getting excited, for the path to truth is thorny and difficult. And if you get too excited, you cannot take a single step forward. You have to be both calm and bold enough to throw yourself into the sharp class struggle and mercilessly destroy all that is rotten in you. Let's discuss this frankly. Make yourself comfortable, go ahead and smoke...."

Comrade Kum Song grasped Paek Gwang Myong's hand which was still trembling a little. He could see the faces of many people who had raised similar problems superimposed on Paek's fair honest countenance. And when he pushed the ashtray towards him, Paek automatically lit another cigarette. He did not inhale, but sat gazing absent-mindedly at Comrade Kum Song's generous face.

As if to soothe the pain in the intellectual's soul Comrade Kum Song spoke in a calm and kindly voice:

"I've an old school friend in Fusung. His name is Chang. He, too, is the son of a rich farmer. And in many respects, his spiritual life was very similar to yours. He also had to face very complex twists and turns, but he found his way overcoming his mental suffering and is now fighting well on the side of the revolution. What matters is one's own consciousness and determination. What others say doesn't matter. As for Korea's intellectuals, they were rich and because of that had the opportunity to learn and so have technology and other scholarly attainments, things the workers and peasants lack. They must not lend these attainments to the aggressors or exploiters, but to the people in

their revolutionary struggle for national liberation. This is the demand of the revolution, and it is the only way they can save themselves. The Korean intellectuals are colonial intellectuals, and they are part of the masses who suffer from racial discrimination and oppression. This is why we believe that people like yourself can and must side with the revolution. In other words, the revolution is calling Mr. Paek Gwang Myong, a man who has lost his homeland, into its fold. Your affluence was built on the working people's blood and sweat. In that respect, the little boy, Chojjae, was quite right when he angrily denounced you as bourgeois, and you are grieved by this. It is very good of you to try to break away from your class origin. But let me tell you once again that you must free yourself courageously, completely from that cursed class environment. For we are making revolution to drive out the Japanese imperialists and to build socialist institutions in Korea; we are not going to allow some other oppressor to replace the Japs and dominate us. But I have faith in the Korean intellectuals' patriotism and sense of justice. I know many intellectuals who resolutely bade farewell to their class and came and sided with the revolution. Most of them had to go through the same agonizing process as you are now. However, quite a few of them are working in the forefront of the revolutionary struggle and are fighting well and resolutely. In the light of these examples, I am sure you can bravely resolve your inner contradictions and affiliate yourself to the revolution. Don't be afraid of the ordeals you may have to face. You can play a great part in our revolution. As in any other revolution, the issue is whether we remain in Japanese slavery or rise up and fight. Particularly at a time like this when we must fight the enemy with arms, everybody will be asked, 'whose side are you on?' and all must give a firm and prompt reply."

When Comrade Kum Song paused, Paek Gwang Myong spoke up, lifting his flushed face.

"I'm afraid of this question. And yet I'm asked it many times a day. It hurts my soul time and again and I feel my heart being torn in two. Please let me say that I always want to answer unhesitatingly that I'm on the side of the revolution. Quite honestly, I was only born into a rich farmer's family. At present I'm as poor as anyone else in this part of the world. I'm conscientiously leading an austere life. But ideas built up by my class origin still persist in my mind. And when I think how

often people will see these hateful ideas that may be working in my head, I'm afraid to say that I'm on the side of the revolution."

As if asking for help, he stretched out his hands, trembling with excitement. His cigarette had gone out.

"That's important," Comrade Kum Song went on to say, "for as long as such ideas persist in your mind, you won't be able to be a true revolutionary. Yet it seems you are not seeking wealth. And you are clearly making an endeavour to break with your class origin. You still have an ideological hangover from that origin, this is clear. So it is natural that people should be rather guarded with you. That is an expression of a sharp, ideological class struggle. What is important is that the Paek Gwang Myong who loves his country and his people, the Paek Gwang Myong who is burning with sense of justice, and ready to discard anything in order to get through to the truth, must finally prevail over the other Paek Gwang Myong, the son of the rich farmer. It will be a long, hard fight. Criticism will help you in your struggle. Our organization, too, will help you all it can, of that I can assure you. Once you have boldly resolved to remould yourself, you must win. You mentioned a moment ago the 'punitive operation' against Big Valley—by the way, the Japanese imperialists did not hesitate to commit atrocities that would shame even the wild beasts in the forest. They stabbed, burned and shot old people, women and children. That is how matters stand, so there is little reason for you, Mr. Paek, to hesitate in helping to save the people, to avenge them and to liberate your country. If at a time like this a patriot like you stands on one side to see which way the wind is blowing, acts timidly, then he himself is committing a crime against his country and his people. Our revolutionary struggle aims to destroy Japanese imperialism and to free the Korean people; this struggle is a nationwide struggle. So fight your inner self boldly, Mr. Paek. Your inner self and, above all, the enemy. What is important is national conscientiousness and the sense of duty it will give you. Also, a clear conviction that only revolution can save our nation, firm determination and unflinching will—your revolutionary awareness. I emphasize again that you can fight at our side until the revolution finally triumphs. This is our hope, and it is also the demand of the revolution itself. We'll leave no stone unturned in order to guide you and all Korea's colonial intellectuals to fight firmly for revolution. Let's go

together, Mr. Paek. For though I know that it is hard for you, it is the only road to life, the road to revolution."

Comrade Kum Song gripped Paek's hand, that still held the extinguished cigarette end.

"Cheer up, Mr. Paek!"

Feeling his warm hand in his, Paek Gwang Myong stared at the wall on which the burning lamp threw a flickering light.

Comrade Kum Song then plunged into a long explanation of the intellectuals' position in the fight for national liberation in colonies.

They talked till long past midnight.

Paek Gwang Myong listened to his words for hours, with bowed head, sitting as still as a statue. He felt as if a hot fire were blazing in his cold heart. Its frozen walls were thawing.

Presently he got up to say good-bye.

He walked along the stream and sat down on a mound covered with grass. Stars were twinkling in the sky and the moon was rising. He lay on his back and stretched both hands up to the dark blue sky.

"Ah, I have just been born today," he shouted as if he wanted the whole world to hear him, for he felt keenly now how worthwhile, how honourable it was to be alive. He blinked his eyes to convince himself of the reality of this great moment, of his regeneration. He rolled over in the grass, with youthful pleasure, with the pure joy of the clear conscience he had felt as a boy when he ran barefoot along the dykes chasing butterflies.

"Let's go together, Mr. Paek. For though I know that it is hard for you, this is the only road to life, the road to revolution."

He remembered these warm words, and sat up with a start.

"You're right. I'll take this road, the road of revolution. And if I fall by the wayside, I'll get up again and again, and again. I will repay your trust. I will follow faithfully what you have taught me this night."

Feeling his throat contract, he clutched his chest and shed tears. A great flame had shot up to melt the glacier in his heart.

Now he was perfectly calm, tranquil even and quite oblivious of self.

He sat there absently, still intoxicated, listening to the murmuring stream and the chirping of grasshoppers, feeling the gentle caresses of the spring breeze.

Presently he got to his feet and walked on. After a while he suddenly paused and gazed around. Nothing appeared in sight but he saw a vision of a long file of Korean intellectuals.

A cock crowed somewhere, and flapped its wings.

The dawn was breaking.

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Mother took the green uniform from the chest of drawers and laid it out on the floor. It was neatly pressed.

"I don't know if it will fit you. Try it on."

She was afraid the button holes were not too well made, as she spread the folded tunic and picked a loose thread off its front.

This was a great surprise. Comrade Kum Song stood motionless, unable to utter a word.

"I intended to make a uniform for you, but as you know, I haven't had too much time. It was made in a hurry. You have formed an army to recover our homeland and I should have made your uniform long ago. But I neglected it. Now, try it on."

With the uniform on her arm, she went up to him.

Comrade Kum Song lowered his head, his eyes clouding with tears.

Presently, he put it on. It fitted perfectly. She had sat up many a long night to make it, stitch by stitch, although she had been very busy, and he could find no words to tell her how grateful he was.

With her usual gentle look, Mother examined the collar and the fit of the shoulders and how it fitted him as a whole and looked quite satisfied.

"It suits you. How well you would look if I could get you a new pair of boots!"

She stepped back a pace or two to admire her son in his new uniform.

Many mothers make dresses for their children, and of course it gives them pleasure. But Mother Kang Ban Sok's pleasure at seeing her son in his first uniform that she had made on the eve of his departure for battle to free his country was truly sublime. Yet though she must have been engulfed in the greatest joy, her face bore a same tender quiet smile as always.

Then she pushed back a few stray hairs over her ears, nodded a few times, and took her jacket off the wall.

"Well, then, let's go."

"Mother!"

Comrade Kum Song took a step forward. But still he could not speak immediately. His heart beat wildly and his face flushed.

"I'll always remember your wish. And I will achieve the thing for which you made this uniform."

His voice shook as he said it.

Mother's eyes were again fixed on the edge of his jacket. Mother and son could always read each other's minds without uttering a word.

"It is your mother's little gift, so wear it."

She said it calmly, and hurried out of the door.

She was going to take a look at the guerrillas, accompanied by her son.

Comrade Kum Song's sturdy figure in the new green uniform and army cap followed a pace or two behind her.

Mother walked ahead beaming all over her face, as if she had completely recovered from her illness. Certainly she was happy that she would see the guerrillas, but it gave her still greater joy to walk along with her son and talk to him, and look at his dependable figure. Though she had brought him into the world, she had lived with him only for a few years. For as soon as he was old enough, he was sent from Pataokou to Mangyongdae, and then to the Hwasong Uisuk School in Fung. Then he had gone to Kirin to study, and had been away from her for seven years. There had been many more years of separation than of reunion. The great gaps had prevented mother and son from sharing each other's affections. So whenever she had had a chance to be with him for a few days or even for a few hours, she had always tried to fill these gaps of separation.

This time she showed him even more affection than ever before. For she had a premonition that she would not see him again for many years.

Before, he had always managed to make his way through the tight enemy cordon, and to evade the clutches of the police. But now the situation was quite different, as Mother knew full well.

Hiding her agitation, she kept looking at him affectionately—words were powerless to express her feelings now. Her

meditative eyes, the quiet smiles hovering about her lips and her coarse, bony hands with the thick knuckles which occasionally touched her breast were more expressive.

Mother, dressed in white, walked along the field path that stretched along the green plain. A soft breeze played with the strings of her jacket and the wormwood plants by the roadside caressed her skirt. A sweet smell rose from plantains, dandelions and grass. A pair of yellow butterflies fluttered after her and kept circling over her head; they flew round and round, as if to settle on the strings, then disappeared into the wormwood field. And high above them in the serene sky, the larks were singing.

The fields of young green wheat and barley were as glossy as a hair smoothed with camellia oil.

The green plain and the blue sky spread as far as the eye could see. Everything spoke of spring.

It almost seemed as if the spring had done its best to give Mother and her son a lovely day for walk.

Blown by the wind, a few strands of her hair danced on Mother's forehead and she slowly pushed them up with her hand. She paused to wait for her son to catch up with her. When he saw this, he immediately caught up to walk beside her.

She again turned her face to look at her sturdy son in the green uniform that fitted him so well, despite her fears that it might be a bit too big. His well-built body, his bright face so like his father's and his firm step—everything about him was so splendid, so dependable.

Meanwhile Comrade Kum Song walked on, his eyes fixed on his mother's figure clearly silhouetted against the blue sky.

They reached the village almost before they realized it.

"Aren't those soldiers?"

Beside the river bank lined with a row of willows, the guerrillas were training. In fours and fives they ran, marched, or fell flat on the ground. Some were engaged in shooting practice under various simulated conditions. All looked smart in their khaki uniforms, as they enveloped the whole area with their swift and vibrant movement.

"Splendid!" she said, as she looked towards the river bank, shading her squinting eyes with her hand.

"How splendid they are! How pleased your father would have been to see them! He tried so hard to form a revolutionary

army like that in his lifetime. Now you have an army. You must hit the Japanese hard."

There was both joy and sorrow in Mother's heart, as in her mind's eye, she saw the future and the past. Scenes from by-gone days arose before her like pictures in a kaleidoscope. She came back to the present and looked around. She found herself in a green field embroidered here and there with dandelions.

Her shoulders drooped and she sighed, as the memories touched her heart.

"You must be tired, Mother. Shall we go on into the village?"

Comrade Kum Song understood how she felt, and looking at her closely, gently helped her to sit down on the grass.

"I'm all right. Those Korean soldiers remind me of the past. Your dead father was so eager to build up such an army, all his dreams were full of it. How happy he would be if he were still alive to see them! I feel as if he were here with me now."

A quiet expression returned to her face and she silently looked back on those days now well past. The son had heard his mother say these words before. But today she had had her first glimpse of the Korean people's armed force that would fight for the Korean revolution, and she had good reason to think of the husband who had worked so devotedly to create such a revolutionary army. It brought the memory of him very close.

Mother's voice was gentle and calm as usual, but with a strong undercurrent of emotion.

Her story was rooted in Mangyongdae, and then moved on to Ponghwa-ri, Chunggang and Linchiang, then back to Pataokou, then to Fusung, and all the events that he had witnessed were still fresh and vivid in Comrade Kum Song's memory.

Suddenly he remembered the tiny house in Hsiaonanmen Street in Fusung. It had been a warm day in early summer, too; the mountains and fields had been as green as now.

Father had called him, and he had entered the room quietly, and had knelt on the reed mat on the floor. There were some bottles of medicine at the head of the bed and a few open books. His sick father pushed aside the white pillow and raised himself on his elbow. Leaning against the wall, he had looked at him for some moments. Then he had asked:

"How old are you now?"

"Fourteen, Father."

"That's right. Fourteen."

The question had not really needed an answer.

"At fourteen, a man is old enough to understand what is going on around him."

Father's voice had sounded solemn.

Breathing with difficulty, he had pushed the quilt aside.

"It is seventeen years since the Japanese usurped our country. They occupied it before you were born. Ten years can change the mountains and the rivers, as the saying goes, and almost two decades have passed since they took our homeland. In these years the Korean people have suffered indescribable hardship and much blood has been spilt."

His face looked drawn and he was seized by a fit of coughing. He had to lie down again with his head on the pillow.

His eyes were burning, and his clenched fists trembled underneath the quilt.

"Listen, my boy. Korea's history cries out to us. Are you going to get up and fight or will you sit and die? Well, what is your answer?"

The boy had raised his head but he could not utter a word, he was so awed by the question.

Father solemnly resumed his talk; at times he raised his thick eyebrows and at times he smiled gently.

At a time when the nation's destiny was at stake and the whole nation was weeping, Father was gripped by the mournful thought that he would soon be breathing his last breath. He had devoted his whole life to fighting to save the country. He had denied his country nothing, and had not worried if his body was torn to shreds or his bones ground to powder. However, the dark clouds of ruin had not cleared for his beloved homeland. And in his anguish he would strike the ground with his clenched fists and cry out. But his spirit was not broken, and now he told his son what he would have liked to tell the whole nation.

"I failed to free the country in my lifetime. Now your generation must take over and win back our national independence. And if you fail because of misfortune, then you pass the torch of freedom on to your sons, and they must carry on the cause, come what may. A people without a country is more miserable than a dog in a house of mourning, as they say. I know that you will not forget this, and will carry on and fight for our lost country."

Father looked so sad, so anxious that it tore at the boy's heart. The father felt both sad and hopeful—conscious of his

own failure to free his country, yet convinced that his son would succeed where he had failed.

"I'm leaving you, son, without finishing my work. But I believe in you. Remember that your body is dedicated to our country and our people. Even if your bones were crushed to powder and your flesh torn to pieces, you must win back our homeland. I wish that I could see my country once more. Son, when our country is free, please bury me on the bank of the Taedonggang River."

As his still penetrating voice rang in the room, he took his son's hand and held it in his under the quilt. And in the clasp of his father's warm hand, the son could feel the sorrow in his whole body.

Comrade Kum Song bit his lip, and dropped his head. At that moment the rays of the setting sun shone through the window onto the green quilt making it dazzlingly brilliant.

Comrade Kum Song raised his head and looked at his father. He said resolutely.

"Father, I promise you to free my country."

Father nodded twice, without speaking, and there was a smile around his eyes.

Then silence.

Comrade Kum Song covered his face with his hands and turned away. He felt the ground give under his feet and the sky turn over. He was gripped by utter hopelessness and felt as if he were falling into a bottomless pit.

Five years passed....

It was a spring day again, and he was sitting in front of Mother. She had a parcel wrapped in oil paper on her lap. She took off the outer wrapping and then a piece of newspaper. Then she opened out a red cloth and took out two pistols.

"Take these. They are your father's gift."

He got up on his knees to receive them.

"Father said you would know what to do with them."

Her voice shook as she said it.

He held the pistols tightly against his beating heart.

He could still feel Father's hand in his under the quilt.

"Father! I'll fight to free our homeland, using these pistols."

He closed his eyes, and let his fancy roam. Hundreds and thousands of young people lined up, guns on their shoulders. Armed ranks marched, stamping the ground. Amid thunderous cheers, the parading army marched past without end....

"Why are they running up the mountain like that?" Mother asked him, taking his arm.

"What?! Oh, yes, the...."

Comrade Kum Song was brought back suddenly to the present and looked around him.

"That's guerrilla training. We need to be well trained for mountain warfare."

"Oh, that's it. I see." Mother nodded to show she understood. She was not really so ignorant. He knew that she had done it to wake him from his fantasy.

It was time to eat, and the guerrillas stopped their training and marched off in columns to the village. They were in high spirits, and their singing echoed across the field.

After lunch Comrade Kum Song led Mother to where the guerrillas were resting. They all jumped to their feet. The platoon leader saluted and stepped up to Comrade Kum Song to report. He asked the platoon leader to let them rest.

Mother was happy beyond words to see the scene.

When she approached them they saluted her.

"How wonderful! Wonderful!"

Mother made them lower their arms which they had held up and nodded repeatedly.

"I feel as if I'm back in the liberated homeland."

Tears rolled down her face. She plucked at one of her jacket tie-tabs. The tears went rolling down her wrinkled cheeks, and she raised her trembling hand to her chin, but did not wipe her eyes.

His eyes still wet with tears, Comrade Kum Song led her by the hand to the middle of the yard where the guerrillas were gathered. Smoothing back her hair, Mother took a step forward.

"My dear young men, do you know why I am crying? You have mothers like me, haven't you? And all your mothers are living in a vale of tears. They have wept all their lives. They weep when they see their children dressed in rags. They weep in the kitchen when all they can give their children is bowls of thin gruel. But after they have cried till they can cry no more, their hearts become lighter. But now, your mothers are crying and beating the ground. They weep because the Japs have taken our country from us, because they stab and burn our children. And cry as they will, they cannot ease their grief. But what a lucky mother I am! I'm weeping because I'm so

happy. When I see you young sturdy men in arms, the tears just spring to my eyes.

"Young men! Hold your guns firmly! They are no ordinary guns. With those guns you must give vent to our people's anger. You must see that your mothers weep no longer. Let your mothers, who have long lived in grief and sorrow, who have been wronged and ill-treated all their lives, shed tears of happiness. Bring us a world where there are no Japs, where your mothers can live in peace and where their wrinkles are smoothed out. Then they will forget their hardship and sorrow, to shed tears of joy as I do."

Mother paused and stood still, her shoulders shaking a little.

The guerrillas sat on the ground, with lowered heads, in utter silence. The barrels of their guns, their caps and the shoulders of their new uniforms were caught in the glow of the evening sun.

"Don't weep, young men! Your mothers may weep, but not you."

She smiled, and again smoothed down the hair around her ears. The red evening glow shone on her face, as the tears flowed down her smiling cheeks and glistened in the evening sun.

Mother's erect figure was both noble and elegant.

To hide the welling tears, Comrade Kum Song turned to the stacks of millet.

Korean mothers were drowning in tears; unhappy mothers were so poor that they could not even devote their abundant love to their children. Even their love was turned to tears, for they cried day and night.

But Comrade Kum Song had never before seen his mother weep, through all the tragedies she had faced.

When she met her husband at Pyongyang Prison she was barely able to recognize him, he was so emaciated. And even then she hid her tears. And when he died, still in the prime of life, leaving her alone in an alien land, she also hid her bitter tears.

Why had the floodgates that had remained tight in those worst moments in her life, now opened up so wide at the sight of the Korean youths under arms?

At *hansik* or *chusok* festival she would go to her husband's tomb alone. She never took her children. She had locked up her sorrow so as not to reveal it to her sons, though her hard

life had made her knuckles rough and put so many wrinkles round her eyes.

Barely able to soothe his grief-stricken heart, Comrade Kum Song lifted up his head to gaze into the sky. Enormous clouds gathered round the top of the mountain spread like flames in the blazing sunset.

Even one teardrop would have torn her children's heart, but she had never shed a tear before her sons. Yet, because she was a woman of lofty sentiments and because she loved her people and her country, her husband and her sons most of all, the floodgates had opened and she wept for her homeland, for the revolution.

Comrade Kum Song stayed in the village all day.

In the evening he took Mother to a doctor. The old doctor with thick lensed spectacles on his nose and a long beard that almost reached his knees, said that her stomach trouble was now chronic and prepared her 20 doses of Korean medicine.

Comrade Kum Song hired an oxcart to take his sick mother home. Mother sat in the cart, a sack of one *mal* of millet behind her, that he had bought. It was an early summer night. The cart clattered along the rough road in the dark.

She was silent, and her body swayed as the cart rumbled along.

"Aren't you cold, Mother?"

"No. It's quite warm."

As they came near the stream, a flock of wild ducks fluttered their wings and flew up in the air, rustling the reeds. The flock flew towards the mountain bend and then back again to settle on the water.

"Yong Ju is at home alone," she said to herself when the wild ducks had settled on the water and the reeds stopped rustling.

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The next day, Comrade Kum Song was preparing to leave.

Kim Chang Dok, their neighbour, came and looked after his family. He again apologized for having neglected the family but asked Comrade Kum Song to leave the matter in his hands.

"Please don't worry. I'll take care of your family. I won't be as good as you are but this time I really will look after your mother and brothers as best as I can. So you can go with easy mind."

Comrade Kum Song bade him farewell. Yong Ju bowed to his brother and went down to the village. He was accustomed to parting with his brother in this way, but he did not know that this journey would be so different from the others.

Comrade Kum Song was very sad that he had not been able to see Chol Ju. But it could not be helped.

He picked up his cap and stepped out onto the porch.

Mother was going to get up but he earnestly persuaded her to stay in her room.

With his heels together, he stood motionless and gazed at her face. She looked out, holding onto the doorframe.

"Mother!"

He looked up at her again.

And she gazed at her son as if to impress his image on her heart.

"I'm leaving now. Do please take care of yourself."

He bowed to her.

"Go. Don't worry about me. Do your revolutionary work well. If you do your job well, it will help me to recover. So don't worry."

"Good-bye, Mother!"

He stepped down off the porch, but went up again. He was afraid Mother might come out and follow him. He had his hand on the door handle but could not shut the door. He hesitated a few moments.

"Shut the door and go. You must go anyhow...."

His mother nodded to him and even smiled, pretending that the parting was easy.

He shut the door briskly, and turned round. There was not a sound in the room.

Her son was setting out on a long journey, and she would have liked to accompany him for ten or twenty *ri* or more. But she controlled her desire and did not even venture out to see him off, because she did not want him to worry. He had a glorious road before him, and she tried to believe that they were not parting, that, though separated physically, their minds would always be bound together. She was a mother devoted to her son, a mother who would somehow find water for him in a

desert, would pump out a whole ocean to find a needle if he needed it, and who would get him off to sleep in the fiercest storm. And yet she managed to be matter-of-fact about the parting.

Comrade Kum Song stood for a brief moment on the porch by the closed door, and then started to walk, not towards the field partitioned by ditches, but round his house. While slowly walking he was wrapped deep in thought.

"What shall I do? Shall I go now, or should I stay for a few more days to see how Mother is?"

"I'm taking a different road this time. Quite different from when I went to Kirin after my return from Huatien or from my journey to Mingyuehkou from Chialun. Each of those journeys could be called a preparation for today.

"Once I leave here, bearing arms, it might be a few years or many years before I return. Throwing out the Japanese imperialists, freeing our homeland, will be a long and arduous task.

"It is a road I must take, I have decided and I cannot take any other. And now I'm at the point of departure. It is a yet untrodden path and untold hardships may await me. Every step of the road will be covered with blood. Blood will flow at every step we take across hundreds of thousands of *ri*, every footprint left by our young men and women will be smeared with blood throughout the country.

"Particularly in this year, when we are just starting, we may suffer disastrous losses far greater than in all the years to come. For young shoots can topple over more easily in a storm, they can be knocked down by a landslide or freeze in the snows.

"However, we must push our way through the rocks and grow, and however many of our branches are broken and frost-bitten, we must stand firm. Yet, however hard our days, however heavy our losses, it's nothing compared with the pain of our homeless people, nothing compared with the tears they shed day after day. Our blood will stop the imperialists from harassing our people. And we will prove to the world that even the most rabid imperialism can be destroyed.

"And as Mother said yesterday, in this way we will hasten the day when Korean mothers can be happy and smile for joy. And we will bring joy, too, to many mothers on unawakened continents, whose children are oppressed, who live in a vale of tears.

"But how about my sick mother? What can I do? She'll no longer be able to earn her living by needlework. And the one *mal* of millet will not last long.

"And how bad will Mother feel on her sickbed when she sees young Yong Ju bringing firewood on his back?"

Absorbed in these meditations, he walked round and round the house, his head sunk on his chest. Dry leaves and gravel were trodden underfoot.

Just when he was about to make another round, the door opened.

"What are you doing here?" Mother's voice shook as she spoke. "I know what you are worrying about. You cannot free your country if you worry about trifles. If you want to make revolution, you have to go out and do it. Though if you want to live at home, you can. Make up your mind...."

Comrade Kum Song paused to listen to his mother. He didn't need to explain—nor was he in a position to do so.

"You have no need to worry about your family," she went on more sternly. "We have managed so far and we will go on managing. You cannot make a revolution if you worry about your family. Spiders do not spin webs over the mouth of a living person, as the saying goes. You must stop worrying about us if you want to achieve the great goal of national liberation. You must increase your forces and fight. If you want my opinion, what you are doing is wrong."

She said no more.

She had made a similar reproach the other day when he had brought the firewood home.

"I understand, Mother. Good-bye." He made a deep bow and turned on his heels.

He walked briskly away along a footpath between the rice fields, without one backward look. He walked faster and faster.

When he reached the bend in the mountain, he stopped to look back.

Mother was standing at the end of the lane, waving her hand. He, too, waved farewell.

Yong Ju who had gone ahead of his brother climbed to the top of a hill and called out his brother, waving his hand—but Comrade Kum Song could not hear him.

Yong Ju's voice resounded through the hills, where the evening sun was shedding its golden rays over the universe.

It was dark in the forest even during the day.

The luxuriant larch and *punbi* trees stood cheek by jowl, with maples and aspens.

The marshy ground gave off a musty smell, and sucked you in almost knee deep. At every step you had to pull your foot out of the squelching mud, bending forward so deep that your shoulder nearly touched the ground. And at every step water oozed out of the soil. Rarely could you get a fleeting glimpse of the blue sky between the thickly interwoven branches, through which the sun cast its brilliant beams.

The sky was blue and endless.

The light green treetops swayed in the wind like waves.

There was no path; it seemed no man had ever ventured into this forest.

A line of armed men and women was trekking through the forest. It was a unit of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army which had left Liangkang and was now marching through the Paekdusan mountains, under the command of Comrade Kum Song.

They were on the first leg of their expedition to the Amnok-gang River area—they were trying to slip out of the Tuman-gang River area and then to make a surprise appearance in the Amnok-gang River.

From the outset the march had been an arduous one.

They had to force their way over the mountains and cleave their way through forest. Sometimes they had to whirl around a mountain, and sometimes they had to walk a hundred *ri* without a rest. And in some places the going was so hard, they covered no more than thirty or forty *ri* and had to make camp.

It seemed strange that though there were many straight, even roads, their road lay through unexplored forests and mountains, across plains and rocky hills.

The group of people was as odd as their route. They wore khaki uniforms and canvas shoes. Half of them carried Jap-

anese 38-rifles, the rest had flintlocks and *totung* guns, and all had knapsacks on their backs. Not ready-made mountaineers knapsacks, but home-made cloth bags with straps sewn on.

All were young, somewhere around twenty. At first glance, they all looked very much alike—sun-tanned faces, and agile dynamic bodies that seemed ready for any situation. Their voices, too, were all high-pitched. Most had only recently wielded hoe or hammer. They had known great hardship and little education. Their vocabularies were limited, but they made up for this with their deeds.

Mingling with them for an hour or so, though, you soon noticed the marked individuality of each.

Pak Hung Dok, the quartermaster, walked in the rear, chattering endlessly. He was slow-moving and at Liangkang he had earned himself the nickname "Slow Coach". He hobbled along in the middle of the line which was spread out twice as far as usual, for their guns were slung back on loose shoulder straps. He was an inveterate joker who always had his comrades in fits of laughter. He was imperturbable—if the sky fell in, it would not shake him. He was flawless in his revolutionary assignment as quartermaster. He saw to the smallest detail; he was strict and exact and could, on occasion, be agile and sensitive.

Now he was telling the "miner", Cha Gi Yong, his best friend, how his father had objected to his leaving home behind. His way of telling the story drew peals of laughter from Cha Gi Yong.

Unlike Pak Hung Dok, Cha Gi Yong was a tall man, with broad shoulders and a long neck. He had pitch-black eyebrows and his eyes were fiery though his features were rather drawn. His back was slightly bent, and he was always likely to go off, like the bullet in a loaded gun. He had left his native village in Cholla Province barefoot and had wandered throughout Korea until a few months back, working at various mines. He was twenty-two now. At the Chongok Coal Mine, he happened to meet an underground organizer, under whose influence he became involved in revolutionary activities. He had even completely forsworn the wine he loved so much. Buffeted by the harsh ups and downs of life, he was a rough diamond, a good-natured, quiet man who would never utter an offensive word. He always put heart and soul into any work he did, he would always chop more than enough firewood and was never satisfi-

ed unless his platoon's camp hut was twice as big as any other. He could put up strong resistance when required and tenaciously endure physical pain. He had never shed a tear or uttered a groan. He had had two of his fingers crushed under a pit-prop, and even then he only opened his mouth and pulled a face, giving no further evidence of the pain he had suffered. He had stood up to all the vicissitudes of a harsh and cruel world.

Nobody knew just what had made him and Pak Hung Dok who was so utterly different in character, into inseparable friends. Wherever Cha Gi Yong happened to be, Pak Hung Dok's humorous chatter could also be heard.

With five men in front, Choe Chil Song walked alone in silence, his back a trifle bent. His face always looked grave, as if in deep meditation. But, in fact, it was not so much meditation as a habit of looking grave. Whenever he had occasion to ask his comrades some small thing, he blushed like a girl. He was illiterate. He had worked for a landlord since he was eleven, until two months ago when he had joined the guerrilla army. But for the fact that he had left his pretty wife at home after only a year of marriage, there was nothing very unusual about him. He always kept his feelings to himself; he neither boasted nor confided his worries. He talked—and walked—quietly and cautiously. When he was really delighted, he would do no more than narrow his eyes and nod. He was dexterous and handled everything with the utmost care. He took such loving care of his flintlock that it always shone like a mirror.

There was a rumour among the guerrillas that he even kept a hoe in his knapsack. Nobody had been able to confirm it, or say, if it was true, why he was carrying such an implement.

He was walking lightly, with a slightly bent head.

Far ahead of Choe Chil Song was Chon Gwang Sik—he was the fifth man in the line. A member of the Kirin branch of the Young Communist League, he was a steady and shrewd fellow, and had a good grounding in theory. In character he had a lot in common with his colleague, Han Hung Su, but he was a stocky man, a peasant type. A man of few words, he could be very gay at times, though gravity was his more usual mien.

He was the company's political instructor, but he never put on airs, and usually had his nose stuck in a book—he read in camp and even on short halts. He would answer any questions the men asked in detail and quite easily. And yet, he was modest

enough to mention which book said this and who had told him that.

He was chatting with the orderly Pyon In Chol.

Three women guerrillas stood out most, always together, always whispering to each other and laughing merrily. They looked so alike in face and gait, and even their laughter sounded so alike that you could hardly tell one from the other—even their names were similar.

The men still called them “the women comrades”, but gradually they, too, began to emerge as individual personalities. Yong Suk was the first to attract the attention of the men.

Slender and taciturn, she had an oval face, long lashes and double eyelids. Her eyes twinkled like the morning star.

A former kitchen maid at a landlord's house, Yong Suk could look rather grim when alone, but she was easygoing and good-natured with her comrades. When she laughed, her hand would stray up to her mouth. She took on most of the kitchen work. Before she joined the guerrilla army she had been educated in Togijom Valley by Mother Kang Ban Sok. Lying in bed she often talked of Mother Kang Ban Sok to her comrades, and then her eyes would grow misty. The women all carried bigger knapsacks than the men, and they were dripping with sweat.

“Look, Comrade Cha,” called Pak Hung Dok, “when do you think we will end our march?”

The question was so abrupt that Cha Gi Yong paused and stared at Pak with an abstracted air. The blue scar on his forehead stood out clearly at this moment, lit up by the sun rays that filtered through the branches of the larch trees. Like most coal miners he had also been marked with that blue scar as big as a penny.

After first jumping over a fallen tree on his long lanky legs, Cha Gi Yong answered slowly.

“You are the quartermaster. You should know more about that sort of thing than I, who spent my time digging coal underground like a mole.”

Pak Hung Dok's big nostrils quivered.

“Why must you tease me?”

“But what's the use of trying to guess at this moment?”

“As quartermaster, I need to know how many meals I shall have to prepare for you until we have won the revolution, don't I?”

"My, you are the best quartermaster I've ever seen. So you are working out how many bowls of noodles will be served at our jubilee banquet when the homeland is freed?"

Cha Gi Yong blushed shyly as he blurted this out.

"That's worth working out, too. If we fight well for about three years, then it should all be settled. What do you think?"

Pak Hung Dok's estimate was not a wild guess; he based it on his own analysis of various aspects of the latest revolutionary developments. And since the revolution would be protracted, he divided the three years into three stages: the first year to prepare, the second as the year of decisive battle and the third year as the final stage or the extra margin, for he believed that one must always allow a margin.

"To my mind..." Cha Gi Yong gazed gravely at Pak and gave his own opinion.

"I'm afraid it will take ten years at least...."

"Ten years? Don't you know that ten years can change mountains and rivers, as the saying goes? I don't think it will take as long as that. You take things slowly because you used to dig the ground."

"Ten years isn't a long time. It takes years to build a single mine, so how can our revolution be carried out in only a couple of years? We are going to drive out the imperialists and set this topsy-turvy world to rights. Don't be in such a hurry—you should know that impatience is a petit-bourgeois habit."

"Stop teasing, man. Tell me how you worked it out."

"Why not?"

As a matter of fact, he had no sound basis for his argument. He thought ten years because he remembered Comrade Kum Song's speech at Liangkang in which he warned that the Korean revolution would be long and hard. But since he had said ten years, he must justify it somehow.

"Ten is three times three plus one. Right?"

"Of course."

Pak Hung Dok concentrated.

"In the first three years we'll build up strength, in the same way as you do prospecting before you mine your coal, you know. In other words, we must find the best means for knocking out the Japs as soon as possible. As for the next three years we'll hit at them—the way you dig a hole, charge with dynamite and rake in the bonanza. But you can't just

dig at random. You have to strike at the vein right in the middle and then crumble it, right and left and up and down. The middle means the Japanese army and police; the top and bottom applies to those landlords, capitalists, pro-Japanese elements and traitors to the nation, who act on their Jap masters' orders. What about the next three years? Just a minute. That does leave another three, doesn't it?"

"Yes, you've explained the first two three-year periods."

"Well, this is the period in which to build socialism."

"How about the remaining one year?"

"That's for winding things up. You always have to wind things up; you have to take your tools out of the pit, dust yourself down and wash your hands."

Cha Gi Yong gave a boisterous laugh, showing his gleaming white teeth.

Beaten, Pak Hung Dok moistened his lips with his tongue as if a little vexed, when an order was relayed from the front:

"No talking on the march!"

"Oh dear!"

Cha Gi Yong was taken aback and slapped the back of his neck with his hand.

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When dusk fell, the guerrillas prepared to make camp.

They felled moderate sized larches to build huts. The hut consisted of two facing lean-to sheds. The shed went up on two shoulder-high posts so that a gently sloping roof was built against a mound. The top and the two sides were covered with branches and twigs. Two sheds were warmed by a campfire between them. These huts or twin sheds were put up here and there, one for each platoon. The soldiers on cook-house duty were preparing food; some using stripped white logs as chopping boards, others chopping firewood, washing rice and building fires for cooking.

This was the busiest hour for Pak Hung Dok.

He walked around, beaming with his chest thrown out. He made his round of the four kitchens, and, with an air of pride, instructed the kitchen police to lay on the following menu:

rice mixed with maize and herb soup for supper, and plenty of rice and sticky foxtail millet for breakfast because the unit would have to cover 100 *ri* the next day.

After his inspection, as Pak was going towards headquarters, he spotted Comrade Kum Song sitting on a tree stump, binding white paper into rather thin notebooks with hemp string. He was doing it with great care. He had started the work of binding on the previous day, and restarted it at every halt during the march.

After reporting on the satisfactory preparations for both camping and supper, Pak Hung Dok sat down by the Comrade Commander and said:

"Please let me do it. I'm quite good at bookbinding."

"Are you?"

He stopped his work and asked him when he had learned bookbinding.

"When I was eight, I went to a village school for a few months. That's where I learned it."

"Then, you finished the *Thousand Characters*?" he asked, passing the string through a hole bored with a gimlet made of a piece of wire.

"Oh, I just learned it by heart as a monk does his sutras."

"Take a look at this. What do you think?"

Pak Hung Dok took the notebook from him with both hands and was at a loss what to do.

"Well, is it all right? I'm not very dexterous, this is the best I can do. But I think you can write on it. Do you have a knife with you?"

There were about fifteen notebooks. After binding them all, he checked them and started levelling them out, one by one, using Pak Hung Dok's knife. He used a piece of wood to rest them on and trimmed the edges with superb skill. As he moved the knife, slender pieces of paper curled up and fluttered down at his feet. In this way he put the finishing touches to each notebook.

Pak Hung Dok could do nothing but stand and stare until he took his leave of the place.

Yong Suk was busy digging a well in a small moss-covered hollow. Big beads of sweat stood on her forehead. Presently she straightened up and wiped her forehead with her bare forearm.

She caught sight of a kind of rhododendron shyly raising

its head on a grassy spot dotted with blueberry bushes. She had not expected to find these yellow flowers, for which Mt. Paekdu-san was famed, here. Their thick buds looked as though they would burst at any moment. She picked a flowering bud and smelled it before tucking it into her hair. Then she went over to the cooking area, carrying a huge bowl of fresh water. Hye Yong was cooking rice. She was watching the fire, and was delighted to see Yong Suk. The flower was a perfect match for her oval face. Hye Yong rushed to Yong Suk and covered her flushed face with her still wet hands.

"Oh, how beautiful!" Fascinated, Hye Yong said, almost to herself, blinking her eyes.

"Herb picking must be in full swing in my home village now."

Hye Yong raised her long lashes and looked at the distant mountains, while Yong Suk gave a smile that brought dimples to her cheeks.

Though they carried guns, they were still women. Their smiling faces showed their longing for their own villages, for the days when they would go picking greens in the mountains. Hand in hand the two girls gazed at the sky for a long while.

"The soup is boiling over!"

Pak Hung Dok's shout resounded through the forest and reached their ears.

The girls gave a start and ran towards the fire at top speed.

"What on earth are you doing, you soldiers on cookhouse duty? D'you think you're here on a picnic?"

"We had something to do. I'm sorry."

"Spring has a disturbing effect."

"Spring is not to blame."

Tilting her face, Hye Yong smiled charmingly and gazed at Pak Hung Dok.

"Hum. What a picture! A woman soldier with a flower in her hair...."

Pak's face looked severe, but he was smiling inwardly.

"I said I was sorry."

"Trying to excuse yourself, eh?"

"Do please forgive us." The girl said, laughing.

Pak Hung Dok stamped his foot and again put on an angry face.

"What's funny?" he asked, turning on his heels with a grin.

Under a tree a little way off, Cha Gi Yong was chopping firewood. His bare bronze shoulders glistened, as he struck at pieces of larch on a thick wooden block with his axe. Whenever his shoulders came forward, a sharp splitting sound echoed through the forest and huge chunks of wood flew up in the air. The logs measuring almost an arm's length split and gave off a smell of fresh resin.

A little farther away, Choe Chil Song was moving at a leisurely pace, his head held sideways and his flintlock slung across his shoulders. He took off his coat and was carrying an armful of anise wrapped in it.

He was going hot at the thought that he would meet the girls in the cooking area. He was afraid of meeting them because they always teased him, and called him "Mr. Bridegroom". So he walked towards the women soldiers timidly.

"Why, Comrade Choe Chil Song is bringing anise." Yong Suk came rushing out, clapping her hands, while Hye Yong stopped to taste the soup and then darted towards him, spoon in hand.

"Thank you very much, Comrade Choe. You are the best housekeeper ever, you know."

After praising him, Hye Yong looked closely at Choe Chil Song's hand and asked him:

"Where did you get the hoe?"

Only then did he remember it and grinned.

"I picked bell-flower roots."

"Bell-flower roots? Aren't you going to give us a chance to pick them?"

The girls, who had only just been talking about herb picking, looked sadly at each other, like children who had had a toy taken away from them, though they kept smiling.

"We must go tomorrow."

"Yes, let's. If we dawdle, we'll miss the spring completely."

Supper time came and each platoon sat on the ground in a circle, with a big bowlful of crushed maize and rice mixed almost half and half. The steam rose heavily, sending out an appetizing fragrance.

Cha Gi Yong poured his soup into his rice bowl and flavoured it with salt. The boiled anise gave off a pleasing smell.

He blew on each spoonful several times before putting it in his mouth.

Pyon In Chol, the shorty, was feeling the heat, and beads of sweat stood on his nose. The tall, long-legged Sang Son was swallowing hot spoonfuls, blinking.

The girls were nowhere to be seen. They were probably eating or talking in the cookhouse.

Though Chon Gwang Sik had often criticized the girls for what he called their feudal inclinations, they always ate by themselves; they said that those who worked in the cookhouse tasted more delicious food.

As the meal progressed Pak Hung Dok always went on an inspection round, and today was no exception; he came leisurely to the tree under which they sat, walking bandy-legged.

"Your meals are not rich enough, but I hope they'll at least fill your stomachs."

"Have you eaten, Quartermaster?"

Cha Gi Yong would always be extra polite at this point, more so than anyone. However, Pak Hung Dok would wipe his mouth and answer that he had had plenty, though no one knew for sure.

In fact, no one had ever seen Pak Hung Dok eating his meal. He always said that he had already eaten it. And whenever he thought that there was not enough, he would go without, pretending that he had finished his earlier. Day and night, he racked his brains how to provide his comrades with as much food as possible, even with a bowl of vegetable soup. When he found it hard to go without entirely, he would take a handful of scorched rice, saying jokingly that he would eat some more with the cooks.

"I'll check for myself if our quartermaster gets enough to eat." Cha Gi Yong put his tin bowl aside and got up. Suddenly he put his arms around Pak Hung Dok's waist and lifted him in the air.

"Oh, you are light. That's too bad. Comrade Yong Suk! You must give our quartermaster plenty of food."

"I've just eaten with the third platoon."

"Just a moment. I must give the quartermaster a hard time."

At first sight Cha Gi Yong seemed to be slack and easy-going but, in practice, he was very observant and didn't miss much. He had long noticed that Pak Hung Dok skipped many

a meal. So Cha Gi Yong hurried off to the third platoon to find out if the quartermaster had had supper with them.

The others didn't know where Cha Gi Yong had been, and they thought he was making fun of the quartermaster.

Cha Gi Yong rushed at Pak Hung Dok and forced him to sit by pressing his shoulders down. And though Pak was well-built and slightly above average height, he was overpowered by Cha who was sturdy and a size or two bigger.

"I won't let you go until you eat two bowlfuls right here in front of me."

"Oh, this is ridiculous! I told you I've had my supper."

"Comrade Yong Suk! Serve him quickly. Do be quick, or you'll starve our quartermaster. Comrades, listen to me. I've found out the truth. Do you know what he's been doing?"

And Cha Gi Yong told them how Pak Hung Dok often cut his meals.

The tears rose to Choe Chil Song's eyes and he turned away and rubbed his nostrils with his hand. Not one of them had realized. Sang Son, who had been drinking water, felt a lump in his throat and stood quite still for a moment, holding his bowl.

"Is this possible! Well, if the quartermaster skips his meals we can't eat either."

Cha Gi Yong reproved with a stern look.

"Let's make the quartermaster eat with our platoon from now on."

"Let's make him eat twice as much as we do for ten days, as a punishment."

All of them voiced their agreement.

Having taken the bowl of rice, Pak Hung Dok scratched his head and gave an embarrassed smile.

"How can you believe such a braggart as Cha Gi Yong? Don't you believe him. How can I be starving? I always eat plenty. Just look at my arms! You'll soon see whether I've been starving myself or not."

Pak Hung Dok rolled up his sleeves and exhibited his forearms.

But no one believed him.

"Honestly, my stomach's always full, even if I don't eat. When you eat heartily, I'm satisfied. Very poor people like me have never eaten their fill. We've lived in such abject poverty that we've had to go without pretty often. I worked as a farm

hand for ten years and I was always hungry. I didn't join the guerrilla army to fill my belly. If I wanted to allay my hunger, I could go to the mountains and plant potatoes where the ground had been burned off. Look at our group here: we're all different—Choe, Li, Pak, Min, Cha and so on. And all these strangers have become one family, eating out of the same pot, you see? When I see you eat your meals, I'm gripped by so many thoughts. However wicked this world may be, you can somehow get a warm room to sleep in and a kitchen to cook your own food the way you want, however humble. But we gave up everything. We wanted to live as we are doing now. We chose this because we were determined to win Korean independence and build the paradise of socialism and communism in our homeland. Sometimes I imagine the day of our national liberation. Then Comrades Cha, Li and Sin will be assigned to their respective posts. You'll become soldiers, technicians, scholars, workers or peasants. And I wonder how I shall feed you all out of the same pot then. It won't be possible. Then you'll all be eating rice, meat and fish with delicious *kimchi* pickles. But will it taste better than these guerrillas' meals cooked by Comrade Yong Suk—the rice and maize with herb soup? Let's never forget our guerrilla food. Don't ever forget. Quite honestly, it isn't that tasty. But it enables us to cover 200 *ri* a day and sleep in the marshes. We could go to the end of the world on this food, couldn't we? When our country is free, I'll invite you all to a meal. Be sure you come then. Okay? When you are taking white rice and meat soup, I'll invite you to meal once a year, around this time; I'll make a porridge of ground maize and herb. Will you come? Really? Then we'll talk about bygone days over our food. All right?"

No one answered. Pak Hung Dok looked round at his comrades' faces and then his thick lips stretched in a smile.

"What's wrong with you? Come on.... Oh, all right, I'll eat. I'll have to take my punishment; I'll eat twice as much as you eat. Comrade Yong Suk, bring everything you have here. I can manage as many bowls as you can serve."

Pak Hung Dok poured soup into a bowl and started to eat greedily, blowing on the steaming food.

After finishing his meal quickly, Pak Hung Dok drank water and asked where Choe Chil Song had gone.

Choe Chil Song was squatting on his haunches in a blueberry bush, doing something.

"Comrade Chil Song, come over here. I must thank you for picking lots of anise for our supper."

Choe Chil Song appeared from behind a maple tree.

"What were you doing there, Comrade Choe?"

"Oh, nothing special."

"What did you do with that thing which you were rubbing with grass?"

"It's a hoe."

"Let's take a look at it."

Confused, Choe Chil Song stood quiet for a moment or two until he was urged to go and fetch his hoe.

Taking the implement from him, Pak Hung Dok examined it with great curiosity. The ash handle was fitted with a shining blade.

"Where did you get this?"

"I found it on my way to Small Plot."

"Found it on your way? You mean you had this in your knapsack when you pulled out that tobacco on the rock at Small Plot?"

"Yes."

"Look, he has kept it so clean that you could eat your rice with it."

The hoe was passed from hand to hand like a curiosity.

"This is no trifle. This means that one can't forsake one's class principles." Chin Bong Nam commented in a grave tone. "I must check all your knapsacks today. It looks as if you have many magic glasses and jars."

When he joined the guerrilla army, Choe Chil Song realized that he did not really need the hoe. But he could not bear to throw it away. It seemed as much a part of him as his four fingers and thumb. He never felt its weight.

The guerrillas talked about the hoe. Then someone speculated that many other things were still hidden in their knapsacks. But he was wrong. In less than ten days after they set out on the march, everybody knew what every knapsack contained; in fact, they were like a communal storehouse. However, they could talk about the knapsacks for days on end; like a mountain spring, the knapsacks contained the past as well as the future.

They were talking on and on about the knapsacks, when they heard a shout.

"Comrades, look over there!"

It was Cha Gi Yong, who excitedly exclaimed.

"It's Mt. Paekdu-san. Mt. Paekdu-san!"

He was on higher ground nearby, where he had climbed to breathe the fresh air. He was making a fuss as if something shocking had happened. Everyone rushed up there as fast as their legs could carry them. Choe Chil Song put his hoe aside and followed.

Now, all of them were on the rocky hillock where an aspen tree stood aslant.

"Oh, that's Mt. Paekdu-san!" Someone shouted.

They all looked at it, straightening up.

Like a vast expanse of ocean, there were forests, forests and again forests as far as the eye could see. Waves of bluish green forest merged with the sky at the horizon. And there above it, soared the silvery summits of Mt. Paekdu-san.

Chon Gwang Sik stood on the highest ridge of rock.

He shaded his eyes with his hand and squinted. By his side stood Han Hung Su as tall as Chon; he appeared to be caught in a spell, his mouth slightly agape.

Choe Chil Song and Pyon In Chol who had come up behind the others kept changing places in an effort to get a good view of the mountain.

One might have expected Pak Hung Dok or Cha Gi Yong to shout for joy or grab hold of somebody in their excitement, but they didn't utter a word, being overcome with awe.

Everyone remained silent.

The sun hung low over the horizon.

The evening mist, which looked like human breath, gradually cleared and revealed the majestic scene.

The sky turned from bluish green to purple and then light pink, while the treetops became greener and greener. The sea of trees that had been dazzling light green turned brilliant emerald, then dark blue and then light grey.

Yet, the summits of Mt. Paekdu-san remained unchanged, raising the silvery white head.

"Comrade Chon, what do you think of that?" asked Han Hung Su, breaking the silence.

"There are no words to describe it. It is so austere that I can only bow low in spite of myself."

"I feel as if I am looking at some great ancestor of this country."

"Ancestor is right, yet, it is also a sacred witness of history."

The muffled voices of the other guerrillas could be heard. They were of one opinion that the mountain looked far more majestic and austere than they had been led to believe.

Every Korean had heard endless stories about Mt. Paekdu-san since early childhood, and even those who had never seen it, carried its image deep in their hearts.

From time immemorial when the universe awoke out of chaos, when our earth had just two or three continents and flames shot out at random to prove that it had once been a great mass of flame, the ground was laid for Mt. Paekdu-san in a corner of the East. No one could tell how many years had passed since then, but one could easily imagine how here, in this spot which was said to have spouted flames until 400 years ago, a majestic creation had emerged out of incessant struggle between hot and cold.

Lava flowed and ashes flew up to form this peninsula of countless mountains, plains, rivers and lakes. So maybe there was some truth in it when people said that you could find the water vein of Chonji or the Heavenly Lake at the top of Mt. Paekdu-san, not only on the summits of the Taebaek Mountains but in Lake Paeknok-dam on the top of Mt. Halla-san.

People born and bred in this land had worshipped Mt. Paekdu-san, the ancestral mountain. All stories about the origin of Korea named this mountain as her birthplace. People had gone so far as to gaze at Mt. Paekdu-san before telling their fortune in the far distant future or forecasting the forthcoming harvest and even the weather on the next day.

Covered with snow for thousands of years, this ancient mountain was skirted on its right by the Great River of Two Thousand *Ri* and on the left by the full and gentle-flowing River Tuman-gang. It has linked up these two rivers at Lake Chonji, and it gives the land its seasons, for spring and summer end here, and it is here that autumn and winter begin.

From the shore of the South Sea where wild red roses bloom, the spring creeps northward, melting the ice on Sangpal-dam Ponds in Mt. Kumgang-san, and sending it down into Nine Dragon Pond and opening the buds of the lilies of the valley. Then the royal azaleas embroider the Rangrim Mountains. And the birch trees on Mt. Chongbong shed black moss and show their silvery white bark and shoot out light green

leaves. Even around this time, Lake Chonji freezes over with a creak and blizzards scatter huge pumice stones right down to the Pegae-bong Hill and even to the foot of Musan Pass. The avalanches of snow make the earth rumble, pushing rocks down into the hollows along the edge of Lake Chonji.

Yet, spring comes here, too.

The water trickling under the ice gives a more pleasant sound and the azaleas on Mt. Paekdu-san shyly shoot out their buds. Spring on this mountain is short and swift. To make up for its brief duration, it endows nature with strong colours, early maturity and elegance.

When the azaleas open their deep pink flowers against the white snow, the rhododendrons push up yellow petals in competition, shaking their thick coquettish leaves. Meanwhile the field poppies open up their petals mischievously and the blueberries join in this merry competition. Then the birches lend a gay air to Mt. Paekdu-san and young larches, *punbi* trees and silver firs dress up anew in green after the hard winter, and their branches all lean to one side like a brush.

Though spring is at its height, the bears on Mudu-bong Peak lick the soft pads of their paws, looking at the snow on the mountainside, while herds of deer move down the valleys to drink. One of them bellows at the sight of its great antlers, like stretched-out arms, still lying on a mound of snow where it discarded them last year; and a hungry tiger roars in the distance.

Lake Chonji in summer is a picture, indeed.

On the frozen surface, where snowstorms howled so fiercely, a tiny bead-like hole appears, grows bigger and still bigger, till, in a few days, it uncovers a blue sea that is 40 *ri* around. Now you see why the water of Lake Samjiyon really is beautiful. Lake Chonji looks like an enormous bowl filled with dark blue dye or like the magic glass that brings the fogs, winds and clouds.

The ancestral mountain brought up the people, raised nature here in this land; it shared its joys and sorrows with the people, and shared their fate. It writhed and lamented with them. Now it had a peculiar spirit about it, and its look had changed, too.

Then the Japanese invaders started trampling the whole country underfoot.

Hurricanes blew over Mt. Paekdu-san's summits all the year round. Trees fell and rocks silently crumbled. When the

savage Japanese chopped off her dense forest with their axes and stripped her naked, she cried out in agony.

However, the ancestral mountain bared its wide breast and waited for Korea's heroes to arrive.

For twenty and more years following the disastrous ruin of the nation Mt. Paekdu-san had flung open its breast, and called, "Come unto me, come to my bosom."

And now, at last Mt. Paekdu-san greeted them.

Mt. Paekdu-san, witness to history, glowed with a warm welcome for the greatest hero this country had ever produced.

"Oh, look at that!" exclaimed Han Hung Su, pointing at the mountain.

The evening glow gradually receded over the horizon and darkness suddenly cloaked the earth.

The snow-capped summits were now steeped in crimson; they looked like a burning torch.

"This is like a torch," cried Cha Gi Yong in admiration. "That day when the guerrilla army was formed, we marched through the thicket of Fatzaitun at night, looking up at the torch the Comrade Commander held high—this is just like it."

Chon Gwang Sik raised his fist and shouted:

"That's right. Look at this side. These forests that are spread out are our people, and none other than ourselves. You could say those scattered mountains are our guerrilla army. All of them have gathered round one centre. That top that holds the torch is our Comrade Commander and...."

All of them let out cries of great joy. They jumped up and down excitedly, waving their arms. The same shouts that had rung out on April 25 were heard.

The top of Mt. Paekdu-san shed a more powerful, deeper light. It stood unchanging; it seemed it would remain unchanged for ever.

Presently, the guerrillas went down to their camp.

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Cha Gi Yong was limping.

He had been walking like that for the last three days. His thick eyebrows were raised and there were deep furrows between

his eyes. His hot breath came heavily through his nostrils. Every time he moved his soaking wet foot, a sharp pain tore his whole body apart.

Yet, he trekked on and on tenaciously, in the van.

His canvas shoes, bound with pieces of linden bark, looked extraordinarily huge. They were torn at the front, too, and his toes stuck out. At every step, the heavy canvas shoes crushed the blueberries underfoot and left a deep footprint in the pumiceous ground.

He carried a rifle on each shoulder and a second knapsack on top of his own, with another rifle put on it. His trousers were ripped in two places and his chest was black with sweat. The brim of his cap leaned slightly to one side. His two top buttons were undone, and sweat was pouring down his chest. Yet he went on steadily, breaking his way through vines and shrubs.

He was followed by Pak Hung Dok, Bong Nam, In Chol, and lanky Sang Son. The women guerrillas were supported by men in the middle of the file. Yong Suk was weeping, but she managed to keep walking, and would not allow anyone to carry her rifle or knapsack for her.

Hye Yong and Myong Ok, their rifles and knapsacks taken over by others, carried nothing, still they dragged their feet, hardly able to move forward.

Chon Gwang Sik, the taciturn political instructor of the company, walked silently at the rear. He also had an extra knapsack. He had great difficulty in walking with his wounded knee. Every time he caught his foot on something, he would fall limply. But he would get up quickly lest his men should see him, and walked on, pretending that there was nothing wrong with him.

The best on the march was Pak Hung Dok. He bragged that he had feet like a donkey, that he would not become footsore even if he walked thousands of miles. No one was quite sure about it, though.

None of them spoke a word; they moved on, looking down at the ground and enduring their pain.

The Comrade Commander showed no sign of fatigue. He would talk briefly with Han Hung Su. Sometimes he would go to the head of the file, sometimes to the rear to join Chon Gwang Sik.

Cha Gi Yong badly wanted a rest. But he had to wait until the order was given to halt. He saw a gentle slope some five

hundred metres ahead, and was sure the order would be given as soon as they got there. So he pushed straight towards it, pursing his lips.

Then he made a wry face. For when they reached the gentle rise which seemed so suitable for rest, Han Hung Su gave no order to halt. The guerrillas had already covered a distance that should have included two breaks.

They filed past a blueberry bush and onto pumiceous ground. This slowed them down because it was very difficult to pull their feet out of the spongy soil.

Yet, despite indescribable hardships, the file kept moving ahead.

Cha Gi Yong was picking his way almost instinctively, the sweat dripping off his chin. Every time he came to fallen trees, he had to make his way round, because he could not step over them. Sometimes, when he went across long stretches under the open sky, the sun beat down on his head and made him thirsty. His throat was parched and burning.

Finally, they called a halt around four in the afternoon. Everyone lay down on the grass, without even slipping off their packs. Their legs were so numb, they could scarcely have gone another step.

A few minutes later, Pyon In Chol, the orderly, came over to tell the men that they would make camp here.

Lying on his back under a larch tree, Cha Gi Yong shouted for joy, waving his arms and laughing.

"Really?"

The scar on his forehead stood out, and he showed his broken front tooth. He had broken it two years earlier, when he had been trying to break a wire with his teeth in the mine.

"Comrade Bong Nam! Why do you look exhausted? Don't railway workers wield their picks in the hot sun?" Pak Hung Dok said jokingly to Bong Nam beside him, raising his body a little from the grass.

Bong Nam was a youth of twenty, with an oval face and one shoulder a trifle lower than the other. He had worked as a linesman at Musan.

"You are quite different from those of us who used to till the land. Cha Gi Yong has said that a miner goes limp once he is out of the pit. And that once the siren blows at noon he doesn't want to move a finger. According to him, the whistle of the siren makes him limp and dizzy."

Cha Gi Yong was wiping his face with a kerchief and just gazing up at the sky. One could not be sure whether he had heard Pak Hung Dok or not.

"So you still have the strength to talk, then, Comrade Pak? Comrade Cha Gi Yong was marvelous. He had looked like a tank when he was wading through the marsh just now. It was almost spectacular to see him forge ahead with his head down."

"Those extra knapsacks I carried didn't seem at all heavy. By the way, Comrade Quartermaster, do you think you can manage all right?" asked Cha Gi Yong, turning to Pak. He was asking if there were any provisions.

"You are not going to use the parched rice powder emergency reserve, are you?" Bong Nam asked anxiously, stealing a look at Pak Hung Dok's composed countenance.

"I don't know if we are allowed to eat our emergency supplies." Pak Hung Dok mumbled, with a set face, as if talking of something quite irrelevant.

"You know better than we do, Quartermaster. But why did we make this forced march today?" asked Bong Nam, massaging his legs and looking from one man to the other.

"Finishing your business in one breath is better than dawdling."

"That's why you can't do day-labouring. You are a born contractor," said Pak Hung Dok as he placed a huge pile of tobacco on a strip of newspaper and rolled it into a cigarette licking it with the tip of his tongue.

After a pause for a smoke the guerrillas became conspicuously active. They set up camp and prepared for supper like experts. Cha Gi Yong again picked up an axe and chopped thick logs.

"Now we are almost capable of marching a thousand *ri* without camping, eh? What do you think, Comrade Han?" asked Comrade Kum Song, wiping his face with a towel after washing at a spring.

"We did 120 *ri* with only one halt."

"If we make allowances for the marshy and spongy areas, we could say that we've walked the equivalent of 200 *ri* today," said Chon Gwang Sik, lighting his cigarette.

Comrade Kum Song sat on a log by the spring where a fresh breeze was blowing. He felt quite refreshed now that the arduous march was over as scheduled without a hitch and he was able to wash himself with cold water.

"Would you bring me my field case? I've got a map in it."

He took a map out of a book, and unfolded it to see the terrain of this region.

"Comrade Cha Gi Yong led today's march very well."

Bending towards the log where the map was, Han Hung Su said in a husky voice.

"They say he was as tenacious as a tank."

Chon Gwang Sik unbuttoned his tunic and puffed at his cigarette, fanning himself with his hand.

"More like a locomotive."

Chon Gwang Sik offered his tobacco pouch, but Han Hung Su refused with a wave of the hand and looked at the map to check their day's march.

"He is a real worker. I couldn't take my eyes off him as he cut his way through those forests. He is much better than any of those motor-driven machines which keep to the roads. I wish I could have shown him to that Japanese journalist."

Brushing back a stray lock of hair that had fallen on his forehead, Comrade Kum Song laughed heartily.

"They are good comrades. Both Cha Gi Yong and Choe Chil Song who came to us as soon as they heard about the Mingyueh-kou Meeting, are the pure and dependable, younger generation. They have not been contaminated by the sectarianism, flunkeyism or dogmatism of the twenties. Moreover, they have the groundwork, the spirit with which to become the solid core of the new type of Party we'll build. We should educate them patiently in our armed struggle. Now, then, let's discuss our route ahead."

He took Han Hung Su and Chon Gwang Sik by their shoulders and seated them on the log in front of him.

After he was seated, Chon Gwang Sik was still turning over in his mind what the Comrade Commander had just said. Whenever he referred to the armed struggle, he would talk about preparations for founding the Party. Among other things, he would stress at every opportunity the need for training the rising generation, the progressive workers and peasants.

Pointing at the map, Comrade Kum Song said that the first phase of their march through the Mt. Paekdu-san area had been covered, and spoke of the second phase to carry out political and military activities.

"We proclaimed the formation of the guerrilla army at Antu and immediately afterwards we held an open May Day

demonstration. Then we fought our first battle at Liangkang. Now we've made it under cover to the Mt. Paekdu-san area, and the first phase of our march has been successful. The enemy must be hunting everywhere for the main force of the guerrilla army. The guerrilla units that gathered at Antu are fighting sporadic action in many places. As for us, we have reached the Mt. Paekdu-san area safely. For the moment, we can operate freely in this area. As I told you at Liangkang, just before our departure, our activities here in this area must sow the seeds of armed struggle. Both the terrain and the composition of the population are promising for guerrilla tactics. Most of the people fled to this mountain region because they could not tolerate Japanese imperialist oppression and exploitation in their homeland. And with the dissemination of Marxism-Leninism in our country after the victory of the October Socialist Revolution in Russia, this spot became the political centre for shifting from a nationalist to a communist movement. This spot, then, with its dense forest cover and ragged valleys is a natural fortress. Though we are setting up our bases in the Tuman-gang River area, we'll be able to use this place to good advantage in our future armed struggle against the Japanese. That is why we must sow our seeds in this fertile field to help us greatly in the future."

Dusk came. After bustling about for some time, Pyon In Chol built a campfire.

Comrade Kum Song rose to his feet and pulled back his wet footwear which had been put close to the fire. He took his tunic off a branch and put it round his shoulders before he came back to resume his seat.

"Some seven kilometres from here through a short cut, there is a village called Chonsangdegi. When I was in Fusung I was told that the highest village under the sky was situated in the Mt. Paekdu-san area, but I have never been there. At that time, too, this mountain region was so remote that Japanese rule never extended that far. Let us first set up our central base here to carry out political activity among the inhabitants of the mountains. As for Fusung, Tungkiang and Hsikiang, I have been there and I think I'm pretty well acquainted with the situation there."

"*Saenal* has already infiltrated this area, hasn't it?" Chon Gwang Sik asked, with a look at Han Hung Su. By *Saenal* he meant the phase of the Comrade Commander's revolutionary ac-

tivity centring on the Saenal Juvenile Union. When the past was mentioned, Han Hung Su, who had worked under his leadership since the time of the Down-with-Imperialism Union in Huatien, felt a little awkward. But he gave a short explanation because he could not ignore Chon Gwang Sik's inquiry.

"Well, that was several years ago, so I'm afraid there won't be much trace left of it by now. There may still be some buds of the revolution left. Anyhow let's go to Chonsangdegi. It is a typical mountain village, and if we go there, we should be able to control adjacent areas. Let's choose a spot very close to the natural fortress the dense forests offer. Especially, we must take the intelligence report into account that Kwantung Army troops have passed through this area and are moving along the Tuman-gang River. So we had better stick to the forests. Later, we'll cross Laoling and make for the Mt. Pawi-san area, to negotiate for a united front with the Independence Army scattered along the Amnok-gang River. But for the moment, let's fix this point here as our goal."

As Han Hung Su and Chon Gwang Sik closed their notebooks and were about to get up, Comrade Kum Song asked them to stay seated.

"Well, Comrade Han, did you check our food situation?"

"Yes, I did. I gather we have barely enough to eat for tomorrow and the day after even if we use up our emergency supplies."

"I thought so. We'll solve the food problem at Chonsangdegi. Comrade Quartermaster Pak Hung Dok must be very worried. I've heard he often skips his meals. You'd better look after him."

"I understand."

Han Hung Su and Chon Gwang Sik both answered at once—and both blushed at once.

Chon Gwang Sik suggested that the guerrillas should have a complete rest that night, as they were well ahead in their political studies.

Chon Gwang Sik, who always came right to the point, asked the Comrade Commander straight out to approve this second request.

"Very well. After supper would you let me meet those comrades whom I mentioned to you yesterday? As for other things I'm aiming to do, I shan't need you. That's all."

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After the two commanding officers had withdrawn, Comrade Kum Song walked slowly through the forest, his tunic still slung over his shoulders.

"The highest village under the sky. And we are going to sow our seeds on land that no one has upturned...." He said to himself abruptly as he walked towards a blueberry bush.

Political campaign in a remote mountain village whose people had not an iota of political awareness was both worthwhile and exciting. Wherever you went you could notice that they had their own peculiarities, were at different stages of development as he had found at Wuchiatzu, Kuyushu and, more recently, at Fuerhho. So you always had to be both bold and very cautious.

"Mass political work is a sort of great artistic creation, that requires perfection and refinement of skill.

"How will the village people who have never come in contact with the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army react? What must we do if we are to encourage those who have been cut off from political life, to participate in the struggle for national liberation, and if we are to set up a huge secret camp here in the future?

"What should we give them and what are they going to give us?"

He walked a long way through the forest, breaking off and parting the fully grown blueberry leaves or nipping and smelling the alder leaves which were fragrant and a trifle pungent.

Those days of *Saenal* which Chon Gwang Sik had mentioned had been impressive. He wondered how Comrade Chang whom he had held up as an example to the school teacher Paek Gwang Myong was faring. But this time he would have been forced to go deep, deep into the mountains.

"Comrade Commander!"

Comrade Kum Song paused and looked over his shoulder to find Chon Gwang Sik standing in the darkness.

"The comrades you mentioned are on their way here."

"Are they? Oh, just a moment, Comrade Chon. I forgot to tell you one thing."

He stopped Chon Gwang Sik and came up to him.

"We must send an advance party to Chonsangdegi the first thing in the morning, don't you think?"

"I've discussed it with Comrade Han Hung Su," replied Chon in high spirits, putting his heels together.

"Who shall we send?"

"How about my going there?"

"You? Good. I also thought that you should go. Take two or three men with you. Will that do?"

"Yes. Two men will do, I think."

"That's for you to decide."

Having seen off Chon Gwang Sik, he went back to his tent.

Choe Chil Song noticed the Comrade Commander walking under the trees, and was afraid that he had been misinformed. He had come here quickly to attend a meeting, as ordered, but there was no one else in sight.

While he hesitated, the Comrade Commander caught sight of him and beckoned him to come.

Choe Chil Song stood to attention and saluted. He had got used to doing this, though he still did it clumsily.

"Come and sit down."

He came over to Choe Chil Song and pointed to a log bench. As soon as he was seated, the Comrade Commander fetched some notebooks out of the tent, which he had bound himself, during every halt on the march.

"Have you learned how to write, Comrade Choe Chil Song?" he asked, with a smile, putting the notebooks on a log beside Choe Chil Song.

"No,... I... haven't."

"You can't write a single character?"

"No, I can't."

Choe Chil Song put his hand up to his neck, and blushed.

"But you can write your name, can't you?"

The Comrade Commander put one of the notebooks on the log and gave him a pencil.

"Write your name here."

"I can't."

He took the pencil with both hands but became perplexed,

putting it down or picking it up, as if it was too heavy to hold. His face felt hot as if it might catch fire any moment.

"Well, why didn't you learn to write?"

The Comrade Commander knew the answer well enough, but asked the question to arouse the man's political awareness. He got up from his seat and came round to stand behind Choe Chil Song.

"The old master used to threaten that he would kick me out if I went to night school. So I wasn't able to learn to write."

"Who do you mean by the master?"

"The landlord."

"What do you think about it now?"

"Of course I must learn but..."

"Of course you must learn but what is the trouble? You mean we haven't a day school or a night school?"

Starting with this, he asked him various questions and then explained certain points so that Choe Chil Song himself would understand why he was illiterate.

The Comrade Commander opened the notebook and asked him to hold the pencil so that he could write.

Choe Chil Song had held a pencil a couple of times before, but now in front of the Comrade Commander, he was uneasy and at a loss what to do.

The Comrade Commander watched him for a few moments and stretched his arm under Choe Chil Song's shoulder to correct the way he held the pencil. Then he held and guided his hand.

"Hold your pencil like this. Draw it along, pressing gently. Now make a dot like this, draw a short line crosswise and another on a slope. Then you do a second dot and draw a downstroke like this, and you have the letter 'Choe'. Look, this is 'Choe', your surname."

With the Comrade Commander's helping hand clasped round his, Choe Chil Song moved his hand up and down.

After "Choe", the words "Chil" and "Song" were written in the same way.

Each time the warm breath fanned his cheek, he felt the same relaxed feeling as when his mother had embraced him.

Holding a former farm servant's stiff hand, Comrade Kum Song guided it this way and that and helped him take his first step towards civilization.

After Choe Chil Song's name had been written on the cover

of the notebook, he turned a page and wrote down the Korean alphabet. When that was written, he turned another page and wrote down Arabic numerals.

Choe Chil Song felt a choking sensation in his throat and his eyes swimming in tears. In spite of his efforts, his eyes became so clouded that he could hardly make out the letters and, finally, the tears rolled down his cheeks and splashed onto his notebook.

As he breathed heavily, his shoulders rose and fell.

But the Comrade Commander kept helping him, guiding his hand.

Presently his gentle voice said from behind:

"Well, what do you say? Do you think you could write exactly like this?"

"Yes! I must write."

"You must learn at all costs. You must not think you are just familiarizing yourself with letters. Imagine that you are fighting our enemies. Do you know why the landlord was so much against you learning? Because, to keep you a slave for ever, he had to keep you unlettered."

"I understand, Comrade Commander."

"Comrade Choe Chil Song, this is a kind of revolution. If you learn how to write and study, you'll know what I mean."

His head down, Choe Chil Song kept wiping his chin.

By this time a dozen or so comrades had gathered round. All of them were illiterate.

They squatted round the campfire. Next to the Comrade Commander sat Choe Chil Song, and then Myong Ok and Chin Bong Nam, the former linesman.

In the same way as he had done for Choe Chil Song, the Comrade Commander led each of them to tell him why he had not been able to learn his letters and asked each of them who had been to blame.

Choe Chil Song watched his comrades' faces through his moist eyes.

Comrade Kum Song had long wondered how to educate the newcomers, and had come to the conclusion that he must first eliminate illiteracy. Before resuming his talk, he asked a few of the comrades how they could get time to study under the present circumstances.

"You are unlettered; you can't even write your own names. That is not your fault. The Japanese imperialists make it a poli-

cy to keep the Korean people uncultured, so as to enslave us. In particular, you comrades were forced to work for landlords like Comrade Choe Chil Song or Comrade Myong Ok, or to labour from your boyhood like Comrade Bong Nam. So how could you find time or afford to learn the alphabet? But, now, we cannot solve our problem just by cursing the Japanese. We are revolutionaries, and we cannot carry out our revolution if you do not understand what is involved. So we have to learn how to write and study, against all odds. An illiterate man can't understand the revolution properly, and he can't develop a firm conviction. If your conviction is not firm enough, you may forsake the revolution halfway and fail to carry it through to the end.

"If you don't learn your letters and constantly study Marxism-Leninism, you will become so ignorant that you will not be sure about the victory of the revolution. What do you say? Do you understand me?" The Comrade Commander asked, holding Choe Chil Song by the shoulder. He tried hard to explain what he wanted to say in the simplest possible manner.

"What kind of revolution is it we are making now?" he asked and went on:

"Our revolution aims at driving Japanese imperialism out of our homeland and at building socialism there in the future. We face the most ferocious and savage enemy ever known in history. The Japanese imperialists are so powerful that they dream of occupying most of Asia. So we have a long and hard way to go. Somebody said just now that we could go to school and study at leisure after several years of revolution. Is that possible? Of course not. That is a completely wrong idea. Study is necessary for the revolution. It is not just to make you clever. To win our revolution, we must arm ourselves with guns, and also with ideas. We must arouse our people and wage a decisive battle with them. Therefore we need greater foresight than the masses. We must be their guide; we must be in the vanguard. We must tell them: 'Here is a rock, so you must go round it. This is a stream and you must jump it!' However, you can't even write your names, or read a book. How can you lead the masses? Where can you lead them when you cannot see ahead? From this it is clear that study is a sort of revolution we must carry out. What do you say? Comrade Chin Bong Nam, you know this very well, because you have worked in boiler rooms since you were a little boy and then carried a shoulder pole on railway construction sites."

Chin Bong Nam, his head still bent down, gave no reply.

"Now, look at this." Comrade Kum Song stretched out his hand and picked up a blazing faggot from the campfire.

"Put this spark in the brushwood. It will kindle a powerful flame and light a fire. Each one of us must be a spark like this."

Gazing at the burning stick, he became momentarily wrapped in thought.

The soldiers' faces lit up with excitement, and he was beaming, too.

Chon Gwang Sik, who had sat behind his men, recalled a solemn scene that he had witnessed several years ago.

When they had been preparing to form the Young Communist League, Comrade Kum Song had made a speech to the members of the Anti-Imperialist Youth League at Kirin.

"Let's hold the torch high! Let us raise the torch of national liberation, the torch of resistance! Keep it aloft even if our hands are charred."

The campfire had been lit on a hillock behind Chiangnan Park. At that time he had held a burning branch over his head and had cried out his appeal. His face had shone then as it did now.

His voice kept shaking the silence and echoed through the forest.

"Now each of you take one of these. Let us begin to root out our ignorance. Let us proclaim another revolution. Though humble, take one each, starting from you on this side, Comrade Choe Chil Song."

Choe Chil Song rose to his feet. He received a notebook and a pencil, his hands trembling almost beyond control.

Then Chin Bong Nam took his, saluting.

They all stood up, one after another.

When they dispersed, Choe Chil Song walked alone through the forest.

Holding the notebook to his chest, he walked slowly among the larch trees, trampling the grass underfoot. It was so dark in the forest that he could barely see the tree trunks.

Walking, head down, Choe looked at his own image in his mind, maltreated and humiliated.

He saw a young Choe Chil Song dressed in ridiculously short hemp trousers, trudging along in the mud, staggering, as he went, with Hwang Bo Gum, the landlord's son, the same age as himself, on his back. Wading across a stream in front of the

school, he had to hold his young master's feet as high as possible to keep his gumshoes dry. Even if the sharp ice cut his thigh, he could not afford to slip.

With an umbrella under his arm, he had waited for Hwang Bo Gum under the aspen tree in a corner of the school grounds. The cold autumn rain streamed down his neck and back. And when he was soaked from top to toe, the young master had come out, opened the umbrella and hurried off by himself.

He had run across the frozen river, pulling the sleigh for his young master. His straw sandals had fallen off and his bare feet had stuck to the ice. He couldn't stop to pick them up, so he had run on to the school....

Waking from his reverie, Choe Chil Song felt something pungent in his nose and his face burning.

He hugged the trunk of a larch tree and placed his cheek against the rough bark.

"Comrade Commander! I'll learn my letters, come what may. And carry out the revolution to put this unjust world to rights."

He sobbed.

Hard work had only brought him abject poverty, he had been humiliated for his harsh drudgery and manhandled as a reward for his obedience. The knots of his bruised life had been so tangled and hardened that they had not been easy to untie.

However, the Comrade Commander's words, the hand that had held his to help him write, and this thin notebook had stirred the long silence within him.

After a long while he turned round. When he reached his hut, he saw the Comrade Commander still slowly pacing up and down by the campfire.

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Soon after Choe Chil Song had entered the hut, his eyes reddened, Cha Gi Yong went out to take his turn on sentry duty.

Holding his gun strap, he limped through larch trees.

A pale half moon seemed to be hanging at the top of a maple tree.

Cha Gi Yong's eyes and mouth gave a painful twitch at every step he took.

After the march he had found both his feet covered with blisters. Although he had changed his foot cloth, he felt a terrible pain that even pierced his head as each foot touched the ground.

When he reached the sentry post, he first looked round. This was a deep forest so he was not expecting anything untoward, but still he had to be watchful.

Pak Hung Dok's noisy hut was now wrapped in silence and only the artful hoot of an owl could be heard in the distance.

Leaning against a fallen tree, Cha Gi Yong felt his ammunition belt. He had only three bullets. Two of them were new, but the third was rusty so he had polished it up, but he was still not sure if it would turn out to be a dud or not. So he loaded his gun with one of the new bullets. He had filled his ammunition belt with fifty or so imitation bullets made of wood. He had done this because the belt was loose, and particularly because he could not bear to see anything empty.

"Comrade Cha, are you going to hit the enemy with those pieces of wood?" his friends had teased him, but he had just ignored their jokes. His greatest wish was to have a heavy ammunition belt, filled with real bullets.

"Once I go into a battle, I will certainly take some 300 of them," he said to himself and looked round again. There was a fallen tree a few paces off, a huge larch tree on this side and a thicket of *punbi* trees on the other, and yonder were fully grown blueberry bushes. That was all he could see round him.

As soon as he had familiarized himself with the terrain, his eyelids became heavy with sleep.

A few minutes later he nodded and then shook himself out of a doze.

He cleared his throat a few times and changed his position to dispel his drowsiness.

He spent some time making the rounds of his patrol area and came back. He leaned against the fallen tree, clutching his gun to his chest.

Comrade Kum Song put out the oil lamp and went outside. He stepped carefully, for his feet were covered in blisters. He seared them with a hot piece of cotton lit with a match.

It was almost two in the morning.

He walked leisurely towards the huts where Platoon Two

was billeted. Rough-hewn, of branches and grass, they were beside a mound on which the moon shed a faint light. He went over to the entrance and looked inside. He could hear snores and moans.

"Oh, my aching feet," someone muttered, tossing about, with one of his feet stuck out.

During those brief moments he could hear moans from several directions.

He watched the scene quietly and then entered one of the huts and struck a match. Chin Bong Nam was lying in the middle. He was asleep, clutching his notebook tight against his chest, and he had an almost imperceptible smile on his face. By his side was Pyon In Chol who was tossing about with his chest bared, kicking his feet up and down now and then. Comrade Kum Song straightened out those who had been pushed out of their places, and adjusted a neckband or two.

The next hut was the same.

After inspecting all the huts, he stood in front of one before he went back to squat down by the campfire.

He was sorry to see his men suffering from pain and fatigue, sorry that he had marched them hard today. He had done so because unless they got through the marshland quickly, they would have had still worse to bear. And yet he was tormented. There was no proper medicine for footsores, nor was there anywhere to keep the sufferers warm. Yet no one had expressed annoyance or become sulky. They had smiled and laughed and made a cheerful hubbub, spending a pleasant night.

Comrade Kum Song left the dying embers of the campfire and paced unhurriedly through the forest. He would have liked to lighten their suffering, even a little, but there was nothing he could do at present. "In the future we may have to cover tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands of miles even. We may have to sleep in the dew, spend nights on the snow. But all this is nothing compared with what the Korean people are suffering now."

He walked on a good while deep in this painful thought. Suddenly he stopped and looked ahead.

Someone was squatting on his haunches, leaning against a log.

It was Cha Gi Yong.

He approached him and looked down at the man seated with his head lowered. He was fast asleep, his gun in his arms.

He was in a posture from which he could jump to his feet at the slightest touch. For a moment the Comrade Commander was lost in thought, staring at him. Then he moved back a few steps, careful not to make a noise.

Cha Gi Yong would have to accompany Chon Gwang Sik to Chonsangdegi in the morning. Watching him from afar, Comrade Kum Song paced round the sentry post.

The eastern sky was already getting lighter.

He was sorry that the day would break so soon. He would have liked his men to have had a good long rest, even for this one night.

After a while he heard somebody coming from behind. He looked round to find Han Hung Su, making the round of sentry posts. Han gave a start and halted. He had taken him for one of the sentries.

"How come you are here, Comrade Commander?"

"Hush!"

He put his hand to his lips and motioned Han to be quiet.

Han Hung Su approached him and explained that Cha Gi Yong was on duty.

"I know. I'm letting him sleep a bit."

"Then I'll replace him with someone else."

Comrade Kum Song paced ahead, his hands folded behind his back.

"Walk quietly."

Han Hung Su paused a moment, thinking to ask a question, but changed his mind and turned on his heels.

After his inspection, Han Hung Su wondered whom he could send to take over from Cha Gi Yong. Then he went briskly up to Cha Gi Yong, and stood sentry himself, just out of the Comrade Commander's sight.

Time passed and a gust of wind shook the forest which caused Cha Gi Yong to jump to his feet. He looked round, rubbing his eyes, and started instinctively to pace to and fro. When his mind cleared, he felt conscience-stricken, realizing that he had broken the sentry regulation.

"Oh God, did I sleep on sentry duty?"

He banged his head with his fist. Taking a few steps forward, he looked ahead. Somebody was standing sentry for him a few paces off. It must be either Han Hung Su or Chon Gwang Sik because he had a pistol at his side.

Rifle in hand, Cha Gi Yong darted up to him and stopped.

"Comrade Company Commander, I've been on sentry duty but I...."

"Are you awake now?"

"Oh, Com...Comrade Commander!"

Cha Gi Yong was struck dumb and could not utter a word. He was dizzy and the ground seemed to be sinking away under him.

"You must be very tired."

He slowly came up to Cha Gi Yong and gently took his trembling shoulder.

"Comrade Commander, I fell asleep instead of keeping a lookout...."

"Enough. You have admitted your mistake, and that's enough."

Shaking the shoulder of Cha Gi Yong who had dropped his head, the Comrade Commander said gently.

"Why don't you ask your friends for help, Comrade Cha? If you felt sleepy, you could have asked a comrade to take your place. You could have asked Comrade Han Hung Su or myself, couldn't you? At any rate, it is a grave error to doze off while on sentry duty. Our men are fast asleep, entrusting everything to the sentry. In no circumstances are we allowed to doze. The enemy wants us to fall asleep, doesn't he? Now, come over here and sit down."

He sat on a fallen tree but Cha Gi Yong remained standing, as if frozen. Cha Gi Yong who had kept his head lowered, suddenly straightened himself up and looked at him with tearful eyes.

"Punish me, Comrade Commander! I was really a...."

He again hung his head and began to sob.

He was tormented not so much by the Comrade Commander's reproof or by his own guilty conscience as by the leader's loving, fatherly care, his going on sentry duty in his place, instead of waking him. Cha Gi Yong had never cried in his life before. He had stood out against a hostile world with such tenacity that he had not shed a single tear, even when his two fingers were crushed. Yet at this moment, he could not hold back his tears because of the deep emotion rising from the bottom of his heart. The tears were pouring down, dripping onto the back of the hand that held the gun strap.

Comrade Kum Song left him alone for a few moments, then he took him by the wrist and made him sit down on the grass.

"You are tired, aren't you?"

As he felt the Comrade Commander's gentle breath against his cheek, Cha Gi Yong opened wide his jet-black eyes and held himself upright.

"I'm tired, Comrade Commander. But I can stand."

"You must have had a hard time enduring such fatigue. You haven't had enough to eat, you had to march through forests all the time and you couldn't sleep in comfort. But you said you had carried coal on your back since childhood and been beaten in the mines by the Japs."

"Because I'm prepared for the worst, I can endure anything, Comrade Commander."

"Prepared for the worst?"

That was the starting-point of a heart-to-heart talk between the Comrade Commander and one of his men. They talked on about their past, the present and future.

At the end of the fallen tree, some distance away, Han Hung Su had by now posted two sentries, and as it was getting light, he widened the area to be patrolled.

Han Hung Su, for his part, felt remorse for what he had done; if he had made the rounds of the sentry posts earlier and more often, he would not have caused the Comrade Commander all this trouble. Meanwhile, he was very sorry that he had sent Cha Gi Yong on sentry duty, when he had led the company on the hard march all day long.

"Comrade Cha. You led our column yesterday with such a firmness. What were you thinking about on the march?"

"Nothing in particular. I just thought that there had to be someone to guide the unit up front."

"Right. You are right. We've risen up with arms in hand to drive out the Japanese imperialists. Ours is a thorny path that no one has ever trodden before. However, this is the path we have to take, we've chosen it ourselves. You acted like a Korean partisan and took the lead the way the working class should. Yes, whatever you do, you must have a guide. Who can undertake this role? Needless to say, it's workers like you. Like a locomotive, the working class must pull different sections of people forward to victory. Therefore, they must be prepared to make greater sacrifices than anyone else. It was your chest that smashed through the vines. You were the first to step on thorny soil. So you were bruised more than anyone else and your feet have the worst blisters. Haven't they? I'm sure your feet are in an awful state now."

"Comrade Commander!"

Cha Gi Yong had hidden his feet bound with arrowroot vines in the grass to avoid some embarrassment.

"Let me tell you frankly, Comrade Commander. My feet blistered and bled. I feel a sharp pain also. But I can walk. Don't worry too much, Comrade Commander. However hard the untrodden path, it cannot hold us back. As long as we can draw breath, we will definitely reach the goal you've shown us. If our legs break, we can crawl, and if we cannot use our hands, we will roll forward and still get there. Our only worry is that we may break regulations as I did tonight and keep you awake. Let me pledge to you, Comrade Commander! I'll never do it again. If I do, you may just throw me aside like a pebble, I should be punished for what I did, Comrade Commander."

Cha Gi Yong looked at the Comrade Commander, again raising his tearful eyes.

His honest, frank and determined confession made Comrade Kum Song's heart beat wildly. He had felt the same confident, proud emotion during the struggle to stop the Kirin-Hoeryong railway line being built when he had witnessed thousands of demonstrators, with clenched fists, shouting anti-Japanese slogans, and more recently, on the day when, on founding the guerrilla army, he had seen the sparkling eyes of the men drawn up in formation. Now he was deeply touched by this plain man, an ex-miner, who was simple and looked almost expressionless.

"Comrade Cha, let me mete out double punishment if there is a next time. I want to tell you just one thing: We Communists must never slacken our vigilance against the enemy anywhere anytime. This is necessary for all our generation, and until capitalism had vanished from the face of the earth."

"I understand, Comrade Commander. I'll always remember."

The conversation stopped for a while, and they could hear people moving about behind the farthest hut. Probably those on cookhouse duty were already making breakfast.

Cha Gi Yong who still hung his head spoke up slowly.

"Comrade Commander! There's something I often think about."

He raised his head and, casting his sparkling eyes on the Comrade Commander, he added: "It's nothing unusual. It's about how to win our revolution."

"That's very interesting. Tell me about it."

"We'll win. As you've just said, when faced with a thorny

bush, we'll break through it and when we come to a precipice, we'll go up it if we have to crawl. Where there is no short cut, we'll go by a roundabout way to reach our goal even if it means walking a thousand *ri*. It'll be harder and more painful, that's all. I'm sure we will arrive at our goal. I know we will. To my mind, it's not so difficult to force the Japs out."

"Why?"

Comrade Kum Song urged him on, gripping his shoulder tightly.

"We workers have the habit of reckoning up the money we'll get when pay day comes round. And I made my calculation the same way."

"Very interesting!"

"There seem to be many Japanese but, in fact, there are not. As far as I know, there are only a few Japs in each township, entrenched inside a police substation or police box. There are just a handful of Japs on every factory management. There seem to be plenty out in the street, but when you watch more closely, there are not so many of them after all. The armed soldiers look formidable at first, but they are fewer in number than the factory workers. So, if each Korean can handle the Japs in his own place, that's good enough. If factory workers rise up and knock down their handful of Japs, that'll be all right. And when the people in a township rise and beat them and counties rise up and smash them, that'll do it. This means ten or a hundred of us will be attacking one Japanese. If we hit the Japs this way, it should all be over very easily."

"Right! That's just it."

His boisterous laughter reverberated through the forest over which day was breaking.

"Yes, you are right. We don't need a complex mathematical formula. But the question is how to rouse all our people. Have you thought about it?"

"No, I haven't. But I think if we guerrillas go into each county, each township and each factory, the problem will be solved. Then we'll rouse the people there."

"You are right there, too. That is what we are going to do. That's why we are treading a hard road through forests like this, you see? As I've said before, we are now going among the people. Once they are awakened, no one can dominate them, least of all the Japanese imperialists. Our own strength will depend on how far our own people are awakened."

"Well, do you think you could take charge of a factory and rouse the workers?"

Comrade Kum Song gave a nudge to Cha Gi Yong who had become rather serious.

Cha Gi Yong's face had begun to look strained, but then it brightened.

"Comrade Commander, I think I could. I'd explain to the workers what socialism is. And that'd do it. I'd just tell them that socialism means a world where there is neither oppression nor exploitation, a system under which the workers and peasants are the masters of the country. And if I promised to bring it to them, they would follow me."

"That can be done. I'll promise you and you'll promise the miners. How about that?"

"Good!"

"Come on now!"

He turned and stretched out his hand. Cha Gi Yong did the same, but immediately pulled it back to check if it was clean, before he grasped Comrade Kum Song's hand.

Again, Comrade Kum Song's loud laughter rang out.

Cha Gi Yong blushed like a girl.

Dawn came. The clear eastern sky showed through the branches. The sky was turning pink.

"Well, we must change the guard now."

Comrade Kum Song rose. So did Cha Gi Yong. There were dewdrops on the grass. The sun shone through the dense forest where the Comrade Commander and his man walked side by side. A sunray reached for Comrade Kum Song's chest and shoulders. The brim of Cha Gi Yong's cap and the tip of his gun shone brightly.

After a while, Comrade Kum Song again turned to look at Cha Gi Yong. The broad-shouldered Cha Gi Yong clicked his heels and saluted.

"I'll come back."

"All right."

Cha Gi Yong trudged off, and for a long time Comrade Kum Song gazed after him. The dewdrops glistened beneath his feet.

When Cha Gi Yong was out of sight, Comrade Kum Song, arms akimbo, walked leisurely down the mound over the dewy grass.

Grimacing with pain, Yun Chol Sam lifted his thickly bandaged leg, which had been wounded by a bullet, and crossed the threshold with great difficulty. He shouted to his wife in the kitchen to bring him his walking stick. Right away she brought a rough stave of ash, which he leaned on to hobble out into the yard. The sun dazzled him after his long stay in bed, and he shaded his eyes to look at the azure sky, raising his bearded chin. Though his sixtieth birthday had not been far off, he had looked as healthy and energetic as a man of forty, but the last twenty days had aged him. Suddenly he had become a weak old man.

He turned to look at the valley, casting a desolate glance over his village huddled between the two hills.

Away to the right were the awe-inspiring summits of Mt. Paekdu-san and to the left a vast expanse of larch and pine forest as far as the eye could see. A waterfall behind the village rumbled and sent up clouds of spray.

But the village was deserted, there was not even a dog in sight. An ominous gloom had descended over everything.

"Oh, to think that heaven and earth have remained unchanged while our village is like a graveyard." The words jerked out painfully as he leaned on his stick. His legs trembled and his head was dizzy—it was his first time up in 20 days.

He went downhill and stood in front of the charred ruins of his home. It had been reduced to ashes before he could raise a finger. Now every gust of wind blew ashes up in the air.

His hollow, gloomy eyes flashed suddenly and widened, then he flopped down listlessly on the wooden mortar lying in a corner of the yard.

"I won't be satisfied till I chop them down, those bastards!"

He made a round of the ruins of his house; the pillars and rafters had been reduced to ashes. He choked, clutched his chest and coughed convulsively for some time. When he had caught

his breath, he struck his flint and lit his pipe. It was here in this yard that the Japanese had shot him in the thigh.

Twenty days ago. Just about the same time of day, the sun had shone over the western mountains. Three bespectacled men in civvies, armed with pistols, had come unexpectedly to this village where no stranger had come in years, and asked for the elder.

Yun Chol Sam had been frightened by their shifty looks, their arrogant way of speaking and their revolvers which they tugged back and forth round their waists. A man with a gun had always worried the old man, and he knew he must obey them without a word.

The bespectacled intruders said that a few thousand Japanese troops were on the far side of the mountain and asked him to see to it that his village produced all the provisions it had.

Some two hours later the plunder began. Packs of khaki-uniformed Japanese soldiers appeared in the valley below the village. They set up tents and built fires, using the firewood the villagers had piled up. They collected up their chickens and pigs and took away their cattle. They searched every cellar and took the people's grain, potatoes, salt and everything that could be eaten.

So Chonsangdegi, the highest village under the sky, was devoured by the hellish dwarfs from the island country.

He hardly slept a wink that night. And the following day when he stood in his yard, there was not a single smoking chimney in the village. There were several gunshots in the night, but fortunately no one was hurt; the Japanese had shot a pig that belonged to a family from Hyesan.

One of the bespectacled agents came again, with several Japanese soldiers, and seeing Yun Chol Sam, he slapped his face and started kicking him.

"Hey, you old dog! Why do you hide things instead of handing them over as you were told? Do you think you'll be allowed to live if you mistreat the Imperial Army of the Great Empire of Japan?"

His thigh smarting from the kicks, Yun Chol Sam got up with an effort and, placing his hand on his stomach, bowed repeatedly.

"What should we hide, sir? You look like a Korean, too...."

"Shut your trap, you son of a bitch!"

The bespectacled collaborator glanced at a Japanese officer who, holding his sabre, stood by with his chest thrust out, a picture of arrogance. Then he shouted at the old man.

"These Kwantung Army men are in difficulties. They are on their way to mop up the Communists along the Tuman-gang River and have lost their way. It's entirely a point of honour with them to ask anything of you.... Now, shut your mouth and bring out all you have!"

"Do what you like. We've brought every last bit we had."

"Don't tell lies. We've just taken two cows that were hidden in the valley back there."

The previous night a village youth named Se Gol had hidden two cows that were about to calve. At dawn one had mooed when giving birth to her calf, and the Japanese had heard and come up to fetch them. The Japanese with the sabre, who had been watching Yun Chol Sam angrily, grabbed him by the beard and shook him. Then, not satisfied with kicking him down, he stamped on the old man's head as he lay prostrate on the ground.

Hearing the groans, his family rushed out into the yard. The younger son, Mun Gi, raised his father in his arms, at the same time striking out at the Japanese's boot with his fist. The Japanese staggered and stepped back, grabbed a rifle from one of his men and fired point-blank at Mun Gi's chest. The eldest son's wife, struck dumb with horror, was about to grab the younger brother when the Japanese fired again—straight through her back. The third bullet went through Chol Sam's thigh.

Then the marauders set fire to his house.

Next day when Chol Sam came to, he found that all was over. He was told that his younger son and his eldest daughter-in-law had been killed and his eldest son Chang Gi who had gone to the mountain to get firewood had been arrested together with other young villagers and herded off to act as pack-horses for the Japanese.

And at his bedside, his four-year-old granddaughter, Yong Hui, who had lost her parents, was weeping bitterly, calling for her mummy.

"I wonder why a man's life is so tenacious. Oh, why didn't the bullet hit my chest or head, instead of piercing my thigh and leaving me alive like this? If I was still alive why didn't they throw me into the fire, instead of saving me so that I should see this tragedy?"

Coughing heavily, Yun Chol Sam got up and descended the slope to meet Se Gol who had narrowly escaped death.

Hearing the sound of someone approaching, Se Gol stopped eating supper and pushed open the door to look out.

"Why did you come, father? You shouldn't have tried to walk in such a state. Oh, my...."

He darted out into the yard to support the old man, helped him into the room and seated him. Then he pushed the small dining table towards the exit to the kitchen.

"I'm afraid I've interrupted your supper. Where's your aunt?"

"I think she's gone to the mountain to gather something to eat for tomorrow morning."

Se Gol's face flushed in confusion as if caught red-handed while doing something evil.

He had not been eating rice but a stew of mountain greens. While in danger he had had a burning desire to survive whatever happened. However, now that he had to starve with all the rest of the villagers, he was thinking that maybe this was worse than being killed by the Japanese.

Leaning lightly against the wall, Yun Chol Sam continued to watch every movement of Se Gol, puffing at his pipe. When leaving home, the old man had so many things to ask or to seek advice about, but now, faced with this young man in person, he did not remember a thing and heaved one long, deep sigh after another. Presently he decided to ask again about the village youths, though Se Gol had already told him everything in detail on his return home the day before.

"So there's no chance of the others coming back?"

Instead of replying, Se Gol shrugged his shoulders and clicked his tongue.

Yun Chol Sam knew well that however much he asked, there would be no encouraging news, so he turned his moist eyes towards the crimson evening sky.

Yun Chol Sam thought that perhaps he should have made all the villagers leave. They had thought that the kidnapped people might be sent back, and had waited for them. They had waited and waited, and now twenty days had gone by, and they were so hungry that they could hardly move. Many of the villagers had badly swollen bodies and were lying in bed.

"They've got guns and keep strict watch over those they have captured, don't you know?"

Se Gol was forced to repeat what was obvious enough.

On the morning after Chol Sam's son and daughter-in-law had been killed and his house burnt down, Se Gol and other young men had been arrested by the Japanese troops and forced to carry their loot. Among them was Chol Sam's eldest son, Chang Gi. He had staggered along behind Se Gol, as if in a trance, carrying a load on his back.

Overnight Chang Gi had become speechless like a dumb animal and his eyes had sunk deep into their sockets. The following evening as he was passing by the edge of a steep cliff, he trapped two Japanese under his arms and rolled down. He had wanted revenge. Immediately short bursts of gunfire rang out and then the file went straight past the spot. As there had been no chance of retrieving any of the three men, the Japanese had simply got rid of the lot together. Only a week later, were the captives allowed to unload their burdens and forced to start building a road. Hundreds of Koreans with picks and shovels were ordered to build a highway to Antu. Judging by the width of it, the road was destined for army transports or armoured cars. The captors distributed a few handfuls of unboiled maize or millet to the Koreans and worked them hard day and night. And every day the Japanese shot a Korean or two in public to intimidate the rest. On the sixth day Se Gol decided to escape with two friends from his village. Choosing a moonless, rainy night at the end of the month, they crawled out on the weedy river bank and waded into the water. It was not long before there was a clatter of guns. That was the last Se Gol had seen of his friends. Alone, he had gone in the direction of Chonsang-degi, trekking over ridges and living on grass and tree bark.

Having finished his story, Se Gol ground his teeth and, in a fury, gripped the doorframe with his hand, and added: "They have the guns, those Japs...."

This was all he could find to say to show that none would survive, let alone return home.

This twice told story discouraged Chol Sam still more. Before he knew the actual situation, he had had a ray of hope and had waited for his village folk to return. Now it was utterly hopeless. Chol Sam had gravely warned him the day before that this truth must be kept secret, but now that, too, would be quite useless.

Suddenly an anguished cry burst from the next house. Another person must have died of hunger. Chol Sam and Se Gol trembled and stared at each other.

"Sang Yong's mother has died, I think."

"I was told that she was sinking fast...."

"Her body has been swollen for ten days or so. Oh, how terrible!"

"They say Chang Sun's father in the next village is dead, too. Is it true?"

"Good God! There is not an inch of land left for us to live on in our golden garden of three thousand *ri*!"

Chol Sam gave a heavy sigh, looking over at the new graves on a gentle mountain slope nearby. His robust son and healthy daughter-in-law were already laid out there in everlasting sleep. He thought it would have been better to set fire to his house and turn it into a grave, too. There was no hope that those taken would return, nor was there any means for their families at home to survive. Only the grave awaited them. Like floating weeds, they had been tossed here and molested there by the waves of the cruel world. With bundles on their backs or heads they had roamed thousands of miles from their native villages in Cholla and Kyongsang Provinces or Kangwon and Hwanghae Provinces, and finally settled here in a desperate endeavour to live. Now there was no way out any longer.

"They frighten us at the point of the bayonet, you know."

Se Gol's blunt reply which implied complete hopelessness was still ringing in his ears.

"There is no hope...."

Chol Sam held his stick with his shaking hand and came out into a corner of the yard, without a parting word. They knew how badly their hearts ached, and had no way to soothe each other; they had even lost the words for greeting or for parting.

Chol Sam limped up the slope with difficulty, changing hands to hold his stick, and sat down on the earthen porch to gaze blankly at the distant mountains.

Se Gol's aunt entered the yard and told him that visitors were coming to see him. She was carrying a basket with some mountain greens.

"Visitors?"

Chol Sam opened his lips slightly and laughed, raising his chin. "Visitors coming? How strange! Why is life so outrageous?"

"Visitors coming? Ha, ha, ha."

At this moment a hum of voices was heard from behind,

and soon a dark figure appeared at the corner of the house. It made his hair stand on end, for he saw the khaki uniform, the cap and the gun on the shoulder. That cursed gun was back again. His eyes flashed with hatred.

"The swine, they are playing with us."

And with that complete calm overtook him, the calm that comes when everything is clear, is an established fact. For agitation is perhaps a shallow aspect of man's feeling.

Two men in khaki uniform approached Chol Sam, bowed to him respectfully and asked if he was the village elder.

One was of medium height with a square face—it was Chon Gwang Sik, and a step behind him stood a tall fellow with a rifle on his shoulder, Cha Gi Yong.

The two soldiers sat down on the earthen porch and nonchalantly asked the old man lots of questions. They started by asking how many houses there were in the village and how many inhabitants.

Chol Sam answered as far as he could, without sounding displeased. After talking to him for some time, they told him, as he had expected, that many soldiers were coming.

He was quite out of his mind, and he no longer cared.

"Let them come if they must!" he said throwing all reserve to the wind. He was puffing away at his pipe absent-mindedly, when he noticed his granddaughter Yong Hui who had come round the chimney of the house opposite, plumped down on the ground. When she caught sight of the men with guns she began to cry, her face crumpled and turned white. At this, a storm of hatred rose in his heart. These second visitors talked to him politely, quite unlike the first, they also looked quite different, but the old man felt sure they were birds of a feather.

After answering their questions gruffly, Chol Sam told them he had something to do and left the house.

Having seen the two soldiers go up the hill behind the village, Chol Sam hurriedly went down the slope to see Se Gol.

Hearing that the Japanese were coming back, Se Gol darted out into the yard.

"Let's have a showdown—we're going to die anyway."

They went from house to house, telling everyone that women, children, the sick and old must take refuge in the mountain and that all able-bodied people must come out, with picks, sickles, forks or whatever they could lay their hands on.

Se Gol had been a shrewd, high-spirited youth; he had

beaten a Japanese overseer while working as a lumberjack and had been in hiding in the village. He led the people up a hill where there was a potato field.

They were determined to fight to the bitter end rather than die of hunger. Ready to fight to the death, they were in high spirits even though they were starving.

"And if the last one of us should die, we will still show them that Koreans are a people they cannot trifle with. Agreed?" Yun Chol Sam roared, waving his stick.

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Cha Gi Yong jumped to his feet. He had been looking down at the village while waiting for his unit to arrive.

"There's something going on in that village, Comrade Political Instructor."

"What?"

Chon Gwang Sik, who had been drawing a map of the area in the notebook on his lap, turned round to look down at the village.

"Just look! What's happening there?"

He could not understand it either.

People had come out of every house and were running in all directions. Women and children were running helter-skelter down the valley while groups of men, tools in hand, were huddled together in the centre of the village.

"That's strange."

"They look as if they are taking refuge."

As Cha Gi Yong got ready to dash down, Chon Gwang Sik stopped him.

"Just wait."

Chon Gwang Sik wanted to know the reason first.

At this moment a bell rang out on the zelkova tree. At this rapid and clamorous sound, the people who had been gathered in the yard of Chol Sam's house rushed up the hillside behind the village.

The women and children who were well down the valley scattered into the forest, crying out wildly.

Immediately the crowd of able-bodied villagers came up to

the hilltop where Cha Gi Yong stood, with his rifle on his shoulder. Armed with picks, rakes and pitchforks, they began to shout in anger.

"You dirty Japanese dogs! Why have you come back? What do you want, you sons of bitches?"

"Kick them out!"

"Get the hell out of here, you bastards!"

As they approached the soldiers, the crowd swore at them hoarsely and closed in their ring step by step.

Chon Gwang Sik, standing erect in the middle of the field, watched the clamorous crowd for some moments. He did not know what to say to calm them down. But he came down quickly because he realized he had to get near them.

"Watch out, boys. He's got a gun, a gun." Chon Sam warned his men.

Then they started to stone him with such ferocity that Chon Gwang Sik could hardly raise his head.

Dodging the stones hurtling past, he warned Cha Gi Yong behind him not to raise his rifle whatever happened.

Sensing their hesitation, the crowd became bolder, slinging stones and stamping their feet.

Unable to stand it any longer, Chon Gwang Sik, with tearful face, took his pistol off his belt and handed it to Cha Gi Yong, then went slowly towards the attackers.

"Listen! Listen to me, please. We are not Jap agents. Villagers! Calm down and listen."

He wasn't even trying to dodge the stones now.

"We belong to the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army. We are not Jap troops."

As they got quite near to Chon Gwang Sik, the crowd rushed forward and surrounded him, yelling at the top of their voices.

Cha Gi Yong who had been following his political instructor, ran down, gun on shoulder, shouting out to the people all the time.

"What's the matter with you? We are guerrillas."

Cha Gi Yong's words were drowned in the wild hubbub of the crowd as they encircled Chon Gwang Sik.

Soon some of the crowd turned on Cha Gi Yong.

"You dirty dogs! Come on! We'll fight you to the death!"

"Go ahead and shoot! You Japanese running dogs!"

Cha Gi Yong could see Chon Gwang Sik grabbed by the

arms and carried off by the crowd. He missed his footing and almost fell forward but, with an effort, straightened up and stepped down towards the people.

"We are not 'punitive troops'. We are Korean soldiers, the guerrillas."

Se Gol whose eyes were smouldering with anger did not even hear. He hurled himself forward, gave Cha Gi Yong a great shove and grabbed the barrel of his gun. Another youth gripped his arms from behind.

Cha Gi Yong, now tottering, begged them:

"Please don't take it. You really mustn't. Oh, what shall I do?..."

He clung to his rifle and would not let it go. He was strong enough to deal with four or five men at one time, but he did not resist.

"Take his gun! His gun!"

Cha Gi Yong hugged his rifle to his chest, and ducked this way and that.

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While the people were dragging Cha Gi Yong into the yard of Chol Sam's house, Chon Gwang Sik was shouting enthusiastically from the earthen porch, waving his arms.

"Villagers! We are the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army. We are fighting the Japs to win Korean independence. We are the army of the Korean people..."

The people gathered in the yard looked at each other with wide-open saucer-like eyes.

Chon Gwang Sik raised his voice louder and louder. His excited shouts held the villagers fascinated and sent them into ecstasies. It was almost too fantastic to be believed, and yet they desperately wanted to believe.

Supporting himself with his stick, Chol Sam hobbled out of the crowd to the speaker and took his arm, asking:

"You mean you are not guides for the Japs? You are Korean soldiers?"

His wry face showed a mixture of awe and envy and a fear

you might expect in a man who had been deceived, trampled on and exploited all his life.

"Villagers! Our Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army, founded by General Kum Song, is an army of the sons and daughters of workers and peasants who have been ill-treated and oppressed. We've taken up arms to strike at the Japanese and free our homeland."

At that moment Se Gol noticed the red star on the cap in Chon Gwang Sik's hand. This was quite different from the Japanese army's yellow insignia. As it began to dawn on him that the red star and what Chon Gwang Sik was saying added up to only one thing, Se Gol tugged at Chol Sam's sleeve in embarrassment. As their eyes met, they could read the misery in each other's face.

"Put down your implements!" Chol Sam shouted, his voice shaking. Then he went up to Chon Gwang Sik and embraced him.

"Forgive us."

There was a sound of picks and forks being limply dropped to the ground.

And at that moment, Cha Gi Yong who had been standing behind the crowd spotted a column of men and women crossing a distant ridge and called out.

"There they come!"

Chon Gwang Sik came down to the yard and called to the people.

"Villagers! General Kum Song is coming at the head of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army. Let's go and welcome him."

As the villagers flocked onto the road with shouts of joy, the long column of guerrillas appeared far away on the mountainside.

"Let's go up to meet them," said Chon Gwang Sik nudging Chol Sam and pointing to the guerrilla unit.

Still more excited, the old man managed to overcome his temporary confusion. Then he signalled to the crowd to go and welcome the guerrilla army. Waving their hands, the villagers ran up the hill, passing by the field littered with picks, sickles and forks.

The guerrillas and people met at a bend in the mountain.

Chol Sam who had come up last because of his wounded thigh and Se Gol who had been spellbound stood still for a while in front of the guerrillas. Then Choe Chil Song and Chin

Bong Nam ran up to them and embraced them. Pyon In Chol saluted Chol Sam, saying that he must have had a hard time here in the mountains. Yong Suk and the other women guerrillas first went to the old people and bowed deeply before them to show their respect, while Pak Hung Dok was happy enough to exchange greetings with the youngsters, patting them on the shoulder.

The guerrillas were overjoyed, while all the welcomers looked rather sullen.

A little later stacks of straw were spread over the spacious yard and the guerrillas and people squatted round in a circle.

The women and children who had taken refuge in the forest hurried back to the village and many voices were heard, calling to people.

Chon Gwang Sik went up to the mountain ridge to welcome Comrade Kum Song who was expected later.

Informed of the imminent arrival of the General, all the villagers, young and old, gathered by the mountainside.

At last Comrade Kum Song came out of the forest and walked towards the crowd, beaming.

Chon Gwang Sik walked up to him briskly and raised his hand in salute. As he made his brief report, Comrade Kum Song smiled and nodded. Meanwhile, the people surged round. He took off his cap, looked round and bowed, extending his greetings to them.

Every villager stepped forward and made a deep bow. Some of the old people prostrated themselves before him and would not rise. Se Gol had elbowed his way through the crowd to be the first to bow to him. He then stepped aside at the edge of the field, covering his face with both hands, his breath coming in hard sobs.

Surrounded by the crowd of people, Comrade Kum Song exchanged greetings with one and all.

He leaned towards the old men and asked them politely how they were. As for the children, he held their hands or patted their heads. He shook hands with young men or put his hands on their shoulders, asked how they were getting along, how old they were and where they had come from. Sometimes he laughed or was surprised by their answers.

When he came to the oldest man in the crowd, Comrade Kum Song made him a deep bow and supported him to Chol Sam's yard.

Chol Sam had gone with the villagers to meet the General but squatted in the field and wept with emotion; now he limped over to the General who was standing in the yard.

"General!" he said, and threw himself at his feet.

Comrade Kum Song tried to help him up, but Chol Sam remained prostrate on the ground, shaking his head. For several minutes his shoulders heaved convulsively before he raised his face and cried.

"General, I should be shot!"

His beard shivered on the ground now steeped in the shadows of the dusk.

"I've committed high treason, and I should die for it a hundred times over. Please, I ask you, Your Honour, to mete out the heaviest punishment to me in public."

Tears flowed down the lines cut deep into the thin cheeks.

Having heard Chon Gwang Sik's brief explanation, Comrade Kum Song helped Chol Sam to his feet.

"Granddad, you must not speak like that. It is obvious that you have been through a great deal in this harsh world."

He held the old man's arm and guided him to a mat of straw spread in a corner of the yard.

Villagers were mixing with the guerrillas, talking animatedly, before they scattered, each inviting a few of the guerrillas to his home.

Chol Sam remained seated, without a word, his head bowed low.

It made Comrade Kum Song sad to see the face of this old man who had been buffeted by the harsh waves of life. He gripped Chol Sam's hands in his.

"Granddad! It's us, young people who are to blame. We should have come to you a long time ago. We are very late."

"I'm greatly ashamed to hear you speak like that, General. It would have been better if I had done away with my sinful self."

Chol Sam again lowered his head, holding his trembling jaw.

Presently Chol Sam brushed away his tears and said:

"General, it is hard for me, a stupid old man living in this wilderness, to understand the Providence of God, but I've never dreamed that the world could change like this. I've sighed away my days, believing that the Land of Three Thousand *Ri* would perish and the descendants of Tangun (the legendary founder

and first king of Korea—Tr.) would die. I hated looking upon the Japanese, so I left Kyongju in Kyongsang Province. It's twelve years now since I came to this mountain. I roamed all over the country trying to eke out a living and finally settled here in the highest hamlet under the sky to bear my hard lot. I'm thinking now that right from the start I made a futile attempt to shirk what Heaven had decreed."

Then he lamented how he had spent his life. Once he had joined the Righteous Volunteers' Army. He had been active in the March First Uprising to fight the Japanese, but all to no avail. Peasants followed him in twos and threes. They, too, had left their homes, unable to endure the combined exploitation of Japanese imperialism and landlords; a village had been set up here. No stranger had been near this place for years and he had thought that he could live here to the end of his days, without ever seeing the Japanese again. Not seeing any Japanese was the mountain people's only comfort in life, for which they had secluded themselves from the world. Twenty days ago, however, even that last, sole comfort had been shattered.

"It was also around this time then."

Chol Sam wiped the wet corners of his eyes and described the disaster his village had met.

"General! Honestly, I never even dreamed that the Korean army might come. I didn't recognize our own army that will save the nation. That was unforgivable. I've long been prepared for death. And if I died this minute, I would have no regrets, because I have seen our army with my own eyes. General, this old traitor should be dealt with according to your military discipline."

Chol Sam could not go on and averted his face.

Someone lit a bonfire in the corner of the yard, now shrouded in darkness. The flames pierced the curtain of the oncoming night and flickered their light all around, throwing into relief the low eaves and log wall of the cottage.

Still holding his hand, Comrade Kum Song told Chol Sam.

"All this is because our country has been taken from us. Every Korean is in the same boat as you. So calm down, and let me take a look at your wound. I'm afraid the bone is broken."

Chol Sam looked up and wanted to speak but the words would not come.

Comrade Kum Song asked Pyon In Chol standing by his side to bring some medicine.

"Let me see it."

He turned to take a look at Chol Sam's wounded leg and touched his knee with his hand.

"Is it here?"

"General, please!"

Chol Sam grabbed the General's hand that had been placed on his knee.

"You mustn't bother. It doesn't hurt. Don't worry about me, and go inside. However painful, a gunshot wound is nothing to the wound in our hearts. Even if I died right now, I would have no regrets at all."

"Say no more. Come on, better uncover your wound."

A few minutes later, Pyon In Chol brought a first-aid kit.

Now, Chol Sam could not avoid rolling up his trousers.

Pyon In Chol held up a burning faggot for light while Comrade Kum Song applied some liniment to the wound with a piece of absorbent cotton. The thigh, shot through by a bullet, was horribly swollen.

Leaning on his hand and supporting his wounded thigh, Chol Sam watched the General applying the liniment to the wound.

Under heavy brows the General had large brilliant eyes. His kindly and noble look, his steady smile—though usually appearing deep in thought—made the old man feel like an innocent child.

He looked with reverence at the General who was dressing his wound.

Chol Sam felt a great swirl of emotion rising in his heart uncontrolled. What this meant, the old man could not fathom. How was he to know that the General was using his own hands to heal thirty million compatriots of a wound, the anguish of statelessness. He merely felt a lump in his throat, deeply moved by the fact that the General, whose great task was saving a nation, was now applying liniment on a shabby old man in a God-forsaken mountain village.

In an effort to check his surging emotion, Chol Sam closed his eyes tight.

"Do you feel any pain here?" asked the General, touching an inflamed swelling.

"General!"

Chol Sam opened his eyes and raised up his body.

"I don't feel any pain at all, General."

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Having found out all about the situation in the village from Se Gol, Chon Gwang Sik, head bent, walked past the charred ruins left by the fire and reached the yard of Chol Sam's house, where he saw Comrade Kum Song passing by a small cottage. He was coming back after taking a look at the village. He, too, was greatly troubled. The village was in an appalling state. In every house two or three people were sick, prostrated by starvation. In the last two days the guerrillas' emergency supplies had been used up to make a thin gruel. Now the villagers and the guerrillas were both suffering from lack of food.

Walking along slowly, Comrade Kum Song was wrapped in thought, trying to find an answer to this terrible problem.

When he reached the corner of Chol Sam's house, he caught sight of a little girl of four or five playing at housekeeping at the foot of a slope sparsely covered with grass. He paused a few moments to watch her, before he squatted down.

"Playing all by yourself?"

The girl who had been absorbed in her game looked up, sniffed and then smiled.

"I'm playing at housekeeping."

"What's this?"

He pointed at the broken remains of a bowl with its flowered pattern still visible.

"That? That's for *kimchi* pickle."

The torn leaves of pigweeds placed on it resembled real *kimchi* pickle.

"What's this?"

"That's rice. I'll put it in the bowls."

"This is a water bowl, eh?"

"No, it's a water jar."

"Oh! That is a water jar, is it? That's really something."

"You don't even know a water jar, uncle."

Pulling a long face, she raised the faded sleeve of her rainbow-coloured jacket threadbare at the elbows and removed the broken piece of jug. She was so cute that he had to stroke her bobbed hair and sit down beside her.

"What's your name?"

"My name?"

"Yes. What's your name?"

"I'm Yong Hui."

"You are Yong Hui. That's my girl!"

Covering the pieces of bowls with the skirts of her jacket, Yong Hui blinked her double eyelids. She still had traces of tears that had run down her face to her chin.

"How old are you, Yong Hui?"

She obviously liked him, and seemed to be asking him to hold her in his arms.

He embraced her and sat her on his lap.

"You must wash your face. You have a pretty face, but what's all this? Now, how old are you?"

"I'm this old."

She spread her thin fingers.

"Four years old?"

"Uhum."

"What do your papa and mamma do?"

"Papa and mamma?"

"Yes."

Yong Hui's eyes suddenly went blank, stricken by fear. Then, as the strain eased gradually, she blinked.

Seeing her odd expression, he was puzzled and turned her the other way round.

Her lips, as red and soft as a cherry, trembled and her cheeks twitched. Her eyes filled with tears and she knitted her brows. Then she burst into tears.

"Yong Hui! What's the matter, what's wrong?"

He wiped her flowing tears, and tried to soothe her. But she kept crying dolefully, shaking her head.

"Mamma, mamma!"

"Oh, dear me! Shall I carry you on my back?"

"Mamma!"

"Shall I give you something?"

He fumbled in his tunic pocket, but there was nothing there that would distract the child.

"Now, look. I'll give you this. Look at this wonderful thing."

He pulled out his fountain pen and showed it to her.

But the little girl would not stop crying. She threw away her broken pieces of bowls and shook from head to foot.

"Oh, little one...."

He looked around but there was no one in sight.

It took him a long time to soothe her. Then he picked her up in his arms and took her to a nearby stream at the foot of a slope to the right of the village. He stepped down to a stone where the rolling water sparkled like jewels. He soaked his handkerchief and wiped Yong Hui's tear-stained face.

Yong Hui had cried herself out. Now she opened her wet eyes and gazed up him, with an incessant hiccuping.

"Yong Hui, my dear. You mustn't cry. You know your name and your age. You're a clever girl. Come, let's wipe your face. Such a pretty face, too! There, chin up, little one, that's right."

Now that he had managed to calm her, he rubbed her face with his handkerchief and walked up the slope with the little girl.

A woman coming in the opposite direction, with a water jar under her arm, paused.

"Have you been crying again, Yong Hui?"

The woman put the jar down at the roadside and took the girl in her arms.

"Are you her mother?"

"N-no, I'm not."

"She suddenly burst into tears while playing."

He explained what had happened, stroking Yong Hui's hair.

"She gives us a hard time, crying herself out several times a day."

The woman told him how Chol Sam's granddaughter had suddenly lost both parents, how she would cry, longing for her mother, when dusk fell.

"I see."

On hearing the story told by Se Gol's aunt, the General became very upset and could not quieten the throbbing of his heart.

So his question about her mother had pierced the still fresh wound in the little one's heart.

"Yong Hui, won't you get down and walk? All right then, you stay here. I'll go and fetch the water and be right back."

The woman hurried down the slope carrying her water jar.

"Yong Hui!"

He held the girl tightly to him and rubbed his cheek against hers. Pressing her moist cheek against his, Yong Hui would not let go her thin arms clasped around his neck.

A little later, Yong Hui started to toddle along on the grass. "Let's pick some flowers here. There are some lovely ones here."

A child's mood changes like the wind; Yong Hui, who had just been crying so bitterly, broke into smiles and ran towards a clump of dandelions, both arms outstretched.

Only then did he notice her feet were bare. Her skirt, made of patches of hemp cloth, turned up stiffly at the edge like wood shavings. She wore a threadbare rainbow-coloured jacket which had been made by her mother stitch by stitch. Now the sleeves were ridiculously short for her.

Comrade Kum Song was lost in deep thought as he watched this simple and innocent child picking flowers and playing.

She was too young to know about the usurped country, about the sharp class struggle, or the enemy who was more brutal than the beasts. Yet, life had wounded even her, had robbed her of everything.

He had seen the suffering of many Koreans, and had suffered much himself, but never had he felt it so painfully as now.

While he was standing on the slope, Yong Hui came back with flowers, smiling and with a mischievous look on her face.

The double eyelids in a sweetly smiling face—so pure, clear and serene—were watching him.

Again he was profoundly moved and hugged her.

The sunset was glorious, tinting both sky and earth a golden brown.

He led Yong Hui by the hand across the grass and she chattered nineteen to the dozen.

Turning the corner of a house, Chon Gwang Sik saw Se Gol's aunt with the water jar on her head, gazing blankly towards the top of the hill.

"What are you looking at?"

"Just look at them."

Chon Gwang Sik lifted his head to see the Comrade Commander and Yong Hui romping together on the grass.

The evening glow was in its full glory. The sun was sinking behind the mountains in the west and flooding earth and sky with its crimson rays.

"That little orphan who has been crying day and night is laughing so cheerfully now."

"Is she?"

Chon Gwang Sik had heard from Se Gol's aunt what had happened to the child's family.

Chon Gwang Sik continued to stand there though the sunset glow had faded and the veil of darkness was descending. Even after Comrade Kum Song had taken the little girl back to the village, Chon Gwang Sik stood rooted to the grassy slope. The stars were twinkling in the sky now, and he paced uncertainly up and down the slope.

"How can I help alleviate the Comrade Commander's worries?" he wondered to himself. "In Kirin I once saw him buy a pair of shoes for the little bare-footed child next door with money from the tiny allowance his mother had sent him for his school expenses. And when he met the refugees from Big Valley on the riverside across the Kaduk-ryong Pass, he could not ignore their plight, either. What has happened here in Chonsangdegi is just as great a disaster as any other we've witnessed. In Yong Hui's tearful eyes he read the future of our homeland being destroyed in cold blood, didn't he? She is ragged and hungry and her tiny feet are bare.

"Yong Hui cried, but it is obvious that the Comrade Commander has shed more tears in his heart. I've been with the Comrade Commander for several years now, but what have I been able to do to help lighten his worries? What did I do for this village? I didn't really offer any effective help. My rash approach caused a misunderstanding with the people, even though it was only for the time being. If I had known the situation beforehand and reported it to him, he would have done something or at least come here prepared."

As if out of his mind, Chon Gwang Sik paced up and down the dark slope criticizing himself mercilessly.

"What can I do to ease his suffering over Yong Hui?" he said to himself.

That night he did not sleep a wink.

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Early in the morning Chon Gwang Sik met Han Hung Su. He told him in detail about the situation in the village as

he had seen it and how the Comrade Commander had been playing in the grass with Yong Hui until dark to comfort her.

The previous night the Comrade Commander had instructed Han Hung Su to send out a detachment to get provisions and medicines, and he was preparing to carry out this order.

Han Hung Su jotted down something on his notebook, put down his fountain pen and looked up, when Chon Gwang Sik resumed.

"Obviously, the immediate task now is to get food and medicines, and bring some normality to the people's lives here, as the Comrade Commander instructed us. We've another pressing problem, too, though. If we send out a few work teams, we can get a certain amount of provisions and medical supplies, though it may not be that easy. But I'm afraid that won't entirely ease the Comrade Commander's great concern about the plight of this village. If we confine ourselves to getting provisions, the Comrade Commander won't leave the village—he couldn't leave Yong Hui and the other children who have lost their parents and cry every day."

Chon Gwang Sik rarely betrayed his innermost feelings but, now, he was breathing hard as he spoke, the colour rising in his face.

"What we must do is to bring back the villagers the Kwantung Army took away. That's what you mean, isn't it?" asked Han Hung Su, who had stretched himself, the space between his eyebrows widening.

"That's right."

They then listened to Se Gol's detailed account and mapped out a rescue operation by deploying one company.

After breakfast the work teams departed as scheduled, to get food and medicines.

Han Hung Su and Chon Gwang Sik walked side by side along the millstream. The waterside was overgrown with lacquer trees, angelicas and other plants with big glossy leaves like tropical vegetation.

Chon Gwang Sik who had been silent for a while spoke quietly, fanning his face with an angelica leaf he had stooped down to pick.

"Will you tell the Comrade Commander again that we'll carry out our assignment however hard it proves to be."

"I don't want you to do anything reckless. The Comrade Commander has already warned you of that. He told me to impress it on you once again."

"I quite agree with you. But, if we don't take this course, our Comrade Commander might feel sad for a long time, mightn't he? I don't know what you would think about it, but what is our duty as his soldiers? We could win great battles by destroying many enemy troops or take control of a particular locality by expanding our organizations and arousing the masses. But I think the first duty for both of us is to alleviate our Comrade Commander's worries, to ease his sorrows, because he is the one who is shouldering the destiny of our revolution and our people. The revolutionary struggle can and must be carried out by ourselves and many other comrades. We are both proud that we have been with him ever since the days in Kirin and Chialun, aren't we?"

Han Hung Su rubbed his nose with his hand for no good reason. A man of few words, when Chon Gwang Sik did speak, he would always say something that touched the other's heart.

As the guerrillas were about to turn the mountain bend, Chon Gwang Sik held out his hand.

"Be seeing you soon."

"Let me come with you a little farther."

"No, or we'll be late. Will you do me a favour? Since he has known the villagers are starving, the Comrade Commander has hardly eaten a thing...."

"I know that. Now go, and take this with you."

"What is it?"

"From the Comrade Commander."

Soon the distance between them widened.

When he had turned the mountain bend, Chon Gwang Sik hopped over a narrow stream. From the small bundle Han Hung Su had given him the smell of parched rice powder was wafted up to him. Having climbed a rise Chon Gwang Sik stood glued to the ground, at a loss what to do with his bundle. Should he take it back or take it with him? Right now, food was as precious as gold dust, but the Comrade Commander was taking such a loving care of us.... He felt even reproachful towards Han Hung Su for not telling him....

Chon Gwang Sik stood staring at the ground, pressing the bundle against himself, before lifting his head abruptly.

"Comrade Commander, I'll carry out my task as you expect. I'll bring them back at all costs."

With misty eyes he made his pledge, holding the bundle tightly in his hands. It was heavier and warmer than a thousand words.

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Pak Hung Dok was excited.

As a rule he gave the impression of being slow-moving, but once in high spirits, he would become faster and more agile than anyone else. He would never be calm enough, however.

"See if you've got all the buttons on your tunic, Comrade Choe Chil Song. If our dress is not neat, we will put the guerrilla army to shame. Now, will you hand it to me, I have to damp this a bit and step on it. Come on, get that for me...."

Choe Chil Song looked round, not knowing what he meant.

"Comrade Choe, give it to me, I say."

"What on earth is it?"

"Why, look, you've got it in your hand."

"You mean the watering can?"

Choe Chil Song handed it over, and then, curled his upper lip in a smile at the thought of the Pak's absurd way of speaking to him. Now he folded his uniform neatly and started stepping on it.

"We are getting ready as if we were going to some important function."

"Why, it really is an important function."

"Where is Comrade Yong Suk?" asked Pak Hung Dok suddenly, looking around. He was spraying his uniform with water in his mouth.

Yong Suk was combing her hair by the stream.

"Combing is also necessary."

Folding his uniform, Pak Hung Dok shook his head to rid himself of the beads of sweat from under his chin. He hurried the guerrillas to get dressed smartly.

They looked incomparably better than in plain peasant clothes.

"How smart we look! The uniforms do suit us, you know. They make us look much more dignified."

Though a trifle faded, they all looked impressive in their uniforms after all the rubbing, brushing and pressing.

They lined up, Choe Chil Song at the head, with his large eyes and high forehead, Sang Son with his long neck and an oval face, and right behind him Bong Nam with his slightly stubborn look and a stocky frame. Yong Suk brought up the rear.

Pulling up his still creased tunic sleeves, Pak Hung Dok looked down at Okbawi-gol where they were making for.

Okbawi-gol was a village, a cluster of some hundred houses, 70 *ri* from Chonsangdegi Village.

This morning Pak Hung Dok had gone down into the village alone and started on the job of getting provisions. The rest of his work team had stayed behind in the mountains.

His head tied with a kerchief, his unlined trousers rolled up to the knees, a net bag in his hand, Pak Hung Dok had dropped into the first peasant house, introduced himself as a traveller and asked the owner for a bowl of water. He returned the bowl at the earth porch, then stepped onto the veranda, walked into the room and asked the owner to give him lunch. Then he bought five *mal* of foxtail millet, and finally, a few hours later, he got the owner of the house to say: "If there is really a Korean army, let me take a look at it."

There were only three or four landlords here in Okbawi-gol—all the rest were tenant farmers or those who tilled fields from which the brushwood had been burnt away. The Japanese police were stationed 15 *ri* away and only came here on an inspection tour once in a while. There was a tiny force of the Self-Defence Corps armed with a handful of rifles.

Pak Won Sik, the owner of the house, who looked under forty, assured Pak Hung Dok emphatically that he need not worry about the enemy. The owner with black whiskers said with pride that he had met Hong Bom Do and other commanders in the Independence Army. He added that if, apart from the Independence Army, a new Korean army called the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army had really been founded, this was a very happy event, indeed, an event that would make all the villagers come out and dance.

Pak Hung Dok talked to the householder about a wide range of subjects on the veranda of the dilapidated thatched

peasant cottage, and when their conversation was over, he had run up to where his comrades were waiting and asked them to get dressed.

Choe Chil Song was the only one to look meticulous. Bong Nam's cap was creased, Sang Son had not cleaned his muddy shoes. As for Yong Suk, her bobbed hair hanging from her cap looked a trifle stiff, but it would do.

Suddenly, Pak Hung Dok had become extremely fussy, quite unlike his usual self. He nagged his comrades about every little detail of their appearance, before he finally shouted "Forward march!"

About the time when Pak Hung Dok's party was entering the yard of Pak Won Sik's house, the householder was coming back after an inspection of the post where the Self-Defence Corps were stationed.

Walking with a swagger, he had been all round the village, spreading the news.

"If you want to see a Korean army, come along to my yard."

He had repeated this to everyone he met.

"Hi!"

Seeing the guerrillas entering the yard, Pak Won Sik came rushing out with open arms to embrace Pak Hung Dok.

"Ain't you the man who came here with the net bag?"

With exclamations of amazement, he embraced every one of the guerrillas. But, when he got to Yong Suk, he was struck dumb. He had never even dreamt of a woman in uniform armed with a gun.

Yong Suk with her full lips, turned-up nose and double eyelids, raised her hand in salute, then bowed to him.

"How fine! Fine!"

Pak Won Sik used such words as he knew to praise her. He even said that Korean women had fought bravely to defend the fortress at Mt. Haengju-san and that during the Koguryo dynasty women used to ride horses and shoot with bows.

While Won Sik was relating all this, the other villagers were gathering in the yard.

Young people who had been weeding the field came running up, still holding their hoes, and the children who had had their noses in their books at the village school came running out barefoot. Belatedly ten or so old men appeared, with their long pipes in their hands. Soon the spacious yard was packed with more than a hundred people.

Won Sik spread straw mats on the ground for the visitors to sit on.

Still puffing at their pipes, the old men repeatedly cried out in admiration and nodded their heads.

The four soldiers stood under the eaves, the villagers seated in front of them.

Now Pak Hung Dok did not know what to do. Usually quick-witted especially in a difficult situation, he now found himself at a loss.

"Say something to them, Comrade Choe Chil Song! Are you going to stay standing here?" he demanded, tugging at Choe Chil Song who was standing at attention with a stiff neck.

"I can't."

His red face turning purple, Choe Chil Song looked exactly as he had on the rock at Small Plot.

Now, reluctantly, Pak Hung Dok looked up, after first sniffing a couple of times. He opened his lips slightly but nothing would come out.

The audience focussed their attention on him.

Overwhelmed by the atmosphere, Pak Hung Dok took a deep breath and looked round, confused.

Then, after a while, he began to talk, his face glistening with beads of sweat.

"Grandfathers, fathers, elder brothers, we belong to the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army under General Kum Song's command."

There was a hush in the yard. Having said the few words in the confusion of the moment, the speaker blinked, hearing his own heavy breathing. He couldn't think of a word to say.

In the brief pause, he suddenly remembered the scene where the Comrade Commander had spoken in the school grounds at Liangkhang.

He felt the strap of his rifle a couple of times before he turned to Choe Chil Song who still stood motionless and expressionless, quite oblivious of his comrade's troubles.

Pak Hung Dok pulled himself together and went on with his speech. He spoke about the significance of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army and about the need for the people to help this army, and then he described the disaster and suffering in Chonsangdegi.

The people decided to save the people of Chonsangdegi first in order to aid the guerrilla army. Everyone offered rice.

After Pak Hung Dok's speech, the people were talking among themselves, when an old man in a stiff, threadbare hemp *turumagi* suggested to his fellow villagers that they go and see the General. They unanimously agreed.

Later when the old man came to Pak Hung Dok and asked him if it would be all right for the villagers to go and meet the General, Pak Hung Dok readily consented.

"That's a very good idea. We'll show you the way."

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Pak Hung Dok's original plan had fizzled out. But he did not worry about this; on the contrary, he thought everything was going well.

The gathering of the provisions had been an unexpected success and he had made a speech to the villagers. What was more, their visit to see the Comrade Commander at their own request was an unusually happy event.

But Pak Hung Dok was not sure about one thing: whether they could obtain more food, on credit.

He put his idea to a discussion.

"When will we be able to come back here to return what we are going to borrow?"

Even Chin Bong Nam who usually agreed with him on most matters was not enthusiastic about it, cocking his head on one side.

"Oh, hell! Aren't you being over-scrupulous?" said Pak Hung Dok, dejected, sitting cross-legged on the grass and tearing up a wormwood stalk.

"If we are to carry out our guerrilla warfare, we must work all over the country. What do you mean we can't come here again?"

"If we borrow, we must repay whatever happens. I'm afraid of borrowing."

"Your worry is not unreasonable. That's why we are consulting, you see. Now, when must we repay?"

Touching his slightly high forehead with the palm of his hand, Pak Hung Dok acted as if his idea was already an accomplished fact.

"We don't know exactly when, do we?" said Bong Nam again, expressing his annoyance.

"We can write an IOU that we'll repay in three years at the latest."

"Going to write an IOU?"

Again Bong Nam tilted his head.

"Certainly we must. Mere word-of-mouth won't do. We mustn't treat this matter lightly."

The other guerrillas were bewildered by Pak Hung Dok's tone of voice, which had become still grimmer.

When there was silence, Pak Hung Dok urged his comrades:

"No objection? If not, let's do as I've proposed."

He pulled out his notebook, put it on his lap, fumbled in his pockets for a while and then produced a pencil stub.

"What shall I write?"

He thought hard for a few moments, leaning his head on one side. Then he wrote "IOU" on the top of a page in the notebook, under which the items and quantity were specified. He wrote that the repayment would be made three years later by an independent Korean Government. At the bottom he wrote the date and Pak Hung Dok's name with his title—Quartermaster, Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army. His handwriting was fairly clear.

"This is as good as one prepared at any scrivener's office."

Pak Hung Dok looked round, his worried expression now turning into satisfaction.

"The trouble is, I've got no stamp or seal."

"Your fingerprint should be enough, I guess."

"That's an idea!"

He straightened his stumpy thumb and breathed on it for the print.

Things went smoothly.

Four of the guerrillas went ahead with loads, and Chin Bong Nam would follow later with an oxcart, bringing the villagers to visit the General.

The advance party covered 70 *ri* in a few hours.

As they arrived at the entrance to Chonsangdegi, someone shouted that Pak Hung Dok was coming back. And indeed, it was none other than Pak Hung Dok who waved his hand as he climbed up the slope, with a heavy load on his back. He was followed by Sang Son, Chil Song and Yong Suk. Two oxcarts were sighted behind them.

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After hearing Pak Hung Dok's report, Han Hung Su's face became pale and drawn. His thin eyebrows stiffened and his eyes which had always sparkled looked bewildered.

Hanging his head, Pak Hung Dok was sitting and waiting breathlessly for his company commander's reasoned analysis of his blunder.

A few minutes later, as he had expected, Han Hung Su began his criticism in a calm voice. He said: "Your first mistake is...."

He would analyse any complicated matter one point at a time. His judgment was always sound, his logic flawless.

Since his blunder was extremely serious, Pak Hung Dok listened to Han's criticism, straining every nerve.

First, according to Han Hung Su, he had not carried out his task as he had been ordered to. He should have got provisions clandestinely. He was told that mass propaganda conducted without understanding the actual situation and making adequate preparations in advance, might well lead to a surprise attack from the enemy.

Second, he should not have invited the people of Okbawigol to come here without prior consultation—he had done so without knowing his unit's plan of action. What would happen if the unit had to leave this place tomorrow?

Third, he was also wrong in giving an IOU. Han Hung Su described it as a sort of "cheerful deception". This was deceiving the masses as well as oneself. The revolutionary army could not use a bond of debt in its relations with the masses. That was a contemptible transaction, only worthy of merchants. In any case, what did "three years" and "an independent Korean Government" mean?

Han Hung Su, who was meticulous in all matters, made an exhaustive analysis of these points.

Yet while elucidating Pak Hung Dok's blunder and calling him to account, Han Hung Su criticized himself for having neglected to take steps to prevent this incident.

The two men were seated facing each other on a bark mat

spread over the earthen floor of the upper room in a log cabin. Time went by. Pak Hung Dok's hands, lying on his knees, became wet with perspiration.

To Pak Hung Dok it had been a bolt from the blue. Yet, what Han Hung Su had said was undeniably true. Before meeting his company commander, he had had no idea that he had made a blunder—he had thought that things had gone unexpectedly well.

"The Comrade Commander said that as fish cannot live out of water, so the guerrillas cannot live without the people. You acted quite contrary to his teaching. If, for any reason, we estranged ourselves from the people the tiniest bit, we would be committing a tremendous crime. Our supreme principle is to serve the people."

Han Hung Su finished talking and awaited Pak Hung Dok's reply. Pak Hung Dok criticized himself, with a lowered head. For a few years before joining the guerrilla army, he had taken part in revolutionary activity but at that time his tasks had been very simple. He would be ordered to go for liaison work to a certain place, meet someone and convey something at an appointed time, to paste up handbills in good time or to eliminate the enemy's running dog. It had been like rowing a boat in a narrow river. All was well so long as he did not bump into its banks. Now he had to sail in the open sea. He, too, knew well that he must not infringe on the people's interests. However, he had not thought that the slightest deviation from the compass, a small error of judgment, might, in the long run, do irreparable harm.

Quite a long time had passed and the red-eyed quartermaster lifted his head.

Since the matter involved the guerrillas' relations with the people, Han Hung Su had to go to the Comrade Commander with Pak Hung Dok and report to him.

Soon they were seated in front of the Comrade Commander.

The entirely different attitude now taken by Han Hung Su tormented Pak Hung Dok still more. Han Hung Su had severely criticized Pak Hung Dok in person, but in front of the Comrade Commander, he took the whole blame on himself. He said that he had failed to prepare the quartermaster's team for any unforeseen situation and that as a commander he had not accompanied them in the performance of such an important task.

Comrade Kum Song interrupted his writing and turned to

the two men. He invited them to sit down in a corner of the narrow room covered with three small pieces of mat. He had been studying the outline of a propaganda speech he was going to make to the villagers that night.

"Comrade Pak Hung Dok, would you repeat what you've told him about your work from the beginning?"

He pushed away the water cup and booklet on the desk and looked up at Pak Hung Dok.

Blinking, his large eyes filled with apprehension, Pak Hung Dok told him exactly what he had done from his departure to his return.

While listening to his report, Comrade Kum Song often interrupted. He roared with laughter when he was told that the armed Self-Defence Corps supported by Japanese police supervision could not do anything about the guerrillas. Supporting his forehead with his hand, he cast a glance at Han Hung Su.

"What do you say about that, Comrade Han? This is certainly a blow to them, isn't it? And what did you say about the master of the house who met Comrade Yong Suk?"

Now that the strain had eased a bit, Pak Hung Dok described with gestures how the peasant called Won Sik had been completely stunned, had held open his arms and shouted in admiration.

"That was also very good. We should often let people see that Korean women, long humiliated and oppressed, are now armed with rifles to fight shoulder to shoulder with the men against the aggressors. Well, were there any women folk there?"

"Yes, housewives and old women wept buckets when they saw her."

"Good. Now, is it true that the peasants are coming here tomorrow or the day after from Okbawi-gol?"

Pak Hung Dok dropped his head and was again petrified.

Comrade Kum Song commented that he had made a very grave mistake and then went on.

"I must point to another mistake in addition to those which the Comrade Company Commander has pointed out. Namely, you got things the wrong way round, for it is not the peasants of Okbawi-gol who should come to us but we who should go to them."

Pak Hung Dok raised his face, with an expression of utter incredulity.

"You may be thinking like this: How can I, a simple sol-

dier, ask my unit to come and go, and how can I call my Commander here? If that is what you think, you are gravely mistaken. I had hoped you were a bold enough soldier to make this kind of promise to the masses. You know quite well that each one of us, be he a soldier or the Commander, must meet the people's request, even with his life if need be, don't you? If the people are ready to come a hundred *ri* to meet us, then we must be ready to go a thousand, even ten thousand *ri* to meet them.

"What are we aiming at by this march? As I repeatedly said before our departure, we are going to show our Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army to the people. We want to bring new hope to those who, in utter hopelessness, are suffering the misfortunes of a ruined nation."

He paused a moment in a pensive mood, before resuming.

"Comrade Pak Hung Dok, won't you go there again and tell them that you'll bring your unit there? What do you say?"

Pak Hung Dok jerked up his head.

"Me?"

That was all he could say, his full lips half open and his eyes suggesting tears.

He could hardly control his feelings at that moment, though he was such an optimistic person that when he felt pain, faced great difficulties or even when deep sorrow gripped him, he always endured it with a smile.

He had not given any serious thought to the relations between the guerrillas and the Commander, between the people and the leader at this particular moment. However, in the Comrade Commander's brief and plain words, particularly those last few words, Pak Hung Dok keenly felt his very real feelings for the people, and this shook him to the core.

"Why are you silent, Comrade Pak? You can do that, can't you?"

Greatly excited, he sat up straight and looked the Comrade Commander squarely in the face.

"I understand, Comrade Commander."

To Han Hung Su's mind, his reply was not to the point.

At that very moment, however, Pak Hung Dok could find no other way to convey that he realized his blunder, what the cause of it had been and that he now more or less understood the noble and great idea contained in his brief reference to the people, and had grasped exactly what the leader always had in mind.

Comrade Kum Song realized that Pak Hung Dok's reply came from the bottom of his heart and that despite his trembling voice, he was full of confidence. So he decided not to say any more to him.

"Comrade Han, let's do the following: We will go there before the villagers leave. Send a message to Chin Bong Nam asking him to remain there. The problem is that Comrade Chon Gwang Sik's party are not back. So we'll leave one of our men here and get in touch with them. As for our future action, we'd better decide on it after we get their report. As to the IOU problem, we'll pay them in cash or send someone to Okbawi-gol before they come, to stop the delivery. We must make sure that this never happens again. We already owe a great debt to the people, do we not? We Communists have not yet liberated our homeland and this is a debt. And another great debt we owe the people is that we are still unable to bring them a happy and free socialist society."

He opened the small window through which the evening sun was shedding its rays. A fresh breeze blew into the room.

The evening mist swept down the mountain. Soft like the human breath, flimsy like the petal of a poppy, it wafted leisurely across the valley.

Han Hung Su and Pak Hung Dok went outside. A refreshing breeze hit their faces.

As they crossed the yard and were about to turn the corner, they heard the voice of a little girl.

"Uncle!"

"Oh, Yong Hui, you've come."

The Comrade Commander came out of the room and took her in his arms.

The scene touched Pak Hung Dok deeply.

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When darkness fell the people flocked into Chol Sam's yard. Se Gol bustled about excitedly, stooping down. He spread the straw mats he had collected on the ground. There were not enough he thought and spread some buckwheat straw in a corner. Then he built a bonfire on the right side of the earthen

porch. For even though it was early summer, the nights were cool and it was necessary, too, to light up the meeting place. A number of youths were running about no less excited than Se Gol. Some of them mingled with the guerrillas and behaved as if they belonged to the unit.

Se Gol brought in bundles of firewood, struck a flint, set fire to the kindlings and the wood piled on top. A bluish smoke curled up towards the eaves of the cowshed.

Meanwhile, Chol Sam was hobbling about the village. Though he had made the rounds in the morning and again during the daytime asking the villagers to come to a meeting early in the evening, he had gone out after supper to repeat the invitation.

Back from his round, Chol Sam said to himself.

"This is an unusual event. In the old days people would interpret joy as 'A sweet rain after seven years of drought, or a reunion with an old friend in a far-off land'. But this joy of ours is much greater than that. Then what shall we say? 'We have been saved.' Will that do? In fact, life is worthwhile now, so is dying...."

His nose began to itch, so he rubbed it a few times, taking his stick in the other hand. He then made his way to the place where the people had gathered.

The villagers had changed beyond recognition.

Those who had prepared bundles in order to move out of the village had untied them and those who had been sick in bed had somehow braced themselves to come out into the field.

Everyone seemed different now, thanks to the joy brought about by the revolution when only a short while ago they had been lamenting over their miserable plight as a people without a country.

When the crowd had almost filled the meeting place, Han Hung Su led his men into the yard.

In an instant, there was complete silence. All eyes were focussed on the guerrillas.

And at a word of command, the guerrillas took their places in a brisk and orderly manner. They saw to it that the people were seated in front, and took up their places behind them.

Now the bonfire was burning fiercely. The flames soared up, pushing back the dark veil of the night. It was as bright as day all round.

The house, the yard and the faces glowed.

Comrade Kum Song, who had been chatting with Chol Sam, slowly stepped down from the earth porch. The audience gave him generous applause. All rose to their knees and clapped. Exchanging glances with each other, they went on clapping loudly.

Se Gol sat beside Cha Gi Yong again. To his regret, he was sitting a bit far back, and he could not see the General's face clearly, but he could not go closer because old people occupied the front rows. Half-standing and half-sitting he clapped his hands as vigorously as he could.

Amid continued applause, the General began his speech.

His first words were not fully audible because the people were still clapping.

"...I was told that this village is called Chonsangdegi because it is the highest village under the sky. That is correct. Yours is the highest village under the heavens. But why did you leave your beloved country and come to a strange land, separating yourselves from the world? Did you do so because you felt weary of your mountains and rivers in the homeland or because you didn't like the people in your village? Didn't you have land to farm? Had you no river to water your paddies and dry fields? Why? Why did you come here to an alien land so many miles away from Cholla and Kyongsang Provinces, from Kangwon and Hwanghae Provinces?

"Yesterday a grandmother told me that she dreams of her native village every night. You ploughed the field that stretched out as far as the eye could see. The paddies were large, and heavy ears of rice coiled round your ankles. Though shabby, you had cosy houses flanked with a few persimmon and pear trees, and the people were kind and friendly. Then, why did you have to leave your homes? Who forced you to? It was the Japanese imperialist robbers. They deprived us of our homeland. Our country, where our ancestors are sleeping and where we have lived for generations, is being mercilessly overrun by the Japs and it is groaning in agony.

"They destroyed our households cruelly. They robbed us of the land, of our houses. They made our people cold-hearted, and finally deprived our beloved land of everything.

"Therefore, we resisted. Because we could not stand it.

"Many of us, however, were beheaded by fodder-choppers, were buried alive or thrown into prison.

"Meanwhile, you left your homes with your old parents and little ones in search of a good place to live in.

"But what happened to you here at the foot of Mt. Paekdusan, in this highest village under the sky? While living in this world, you wanted to isolate yourselves from it, and while longing for your homes, you cut yourselves off from them. And what happened to your wish to live without seeing Japs?"

"I was told that you were preparing to move out of this village but where do you think you can go? Have you any place to go to?..."

Brushing back a few stray hairs that had fallen over his forehead, he looked round the audience. The people gazed up at him, with bated breath. Their eyes showed a burning desire and an appeal.

His glance roved between the audience, gripped by their utter melancholy, and the fierce flames of the bonfire. Then, suddenly, before his eyes, he saw the very epitome of Korea. He felt that she was writhing in agony and bleeding. And the image of Yong Hui in tears crossed his mind.

When he had recovered his breath, Comrade Kum Song went on, trying to express himself as simply as possible.

"Perhaps you know by now that unless you overthrow the Japanese imperialists, you won't be free from their brutality.

"As long as they are here in this land, they'll follow you wherever you go.

"Somebody said that those Kwantung Army troops accidentally had lost their way to Chientao and harassed you here. But they had not lost their way. They knew Koreans lived here and they came, and carried out what they had planned beforehand.

"Why were old Yun's son and daughter-in-law shot to death and he himself shot too?"

"Why is it that so many people who were forced to carry goods for them have not come back yet? And why does Yong Hui now on that woman's lap cry every day? All this is because of the Japanese devils. They appear wherever there are Koreans and commit atrocities as they did here.

"Where do you think you can go? The Korean nation has been pushed back and back for the last 20 years. Now it is on the brink of a precipice. There is no longer room to withdraw...."

Posing questions and answering them himself, he brought home to them the plight of the Korean people now trampled down under Japanese imperialist rule. At times taking a few steps forward towards the audience and at times stepping back,

using metaphors and proverbs, he focussed the listeners' attention on a single point.

He explained what the forest meant by showing the trees; he illustrated every aspect of Korea's plight by closely analysing the situation of the highest village under the sky.

As if seeing the palms of their own hands, the people now saw the essence of the complex national problem and class struggle.

"Good neighbours, you all must bear in mind what he is saying. You must imprint the General's words in your hearts. If you want to live like men from now on, you must remember what he says!"

Chol Sam had spent the whole day with the General but it was not enough just to tell him about the many vicissitudes of his 60 years.

"Why not? We have a way out at last. We the white-clad nation have been saved," said an elderly man who had been listening to the speech with close attention. Raising himself up on his knees, he replied in the Kyongsang dialect, his voice choking.

The General's speech, the audience's emotion and sporadic exclamations from the audience merged into a single whole, warming up the yard more and more as the night advanced.

Comrade Kum Song went on.

"Now, not a step backward. You must firmly hold on to the land passed down by your ancestors and resist. The steps we are going to take must be steps forward towards the homeland. Our march has begun. Our bitter past as a people kicked and thrown about by foreigners is over, and the great advance to return to our own land has begun. The decisive battle is on right now.

"This is a fight that will not end unless one of the two sides perishes. We, the guerrillas, sons and daughters of harassed and oppressed workers and peasants, have risen for a bloody battle to win back our homeland.

"Our every step may be soaked with blood. And we know well that sometimes we will have to leap over the bodies of our brothers to fight on.

"However, that is the way we must go.

"Villagers, just think about it!

"We cannot hand over our anguish as stateless people to

the little ones now sitting on your laps, the babies at your breasts, can we?

"Our guerrillas sitting here also have old parents, wives and children, and younger brothers and sisters.

"They too are having a hard time, bled white and molested by the Japanese and their running dogs, the landlords and the capitalists. They too were kicked around and wandered about, carrying their bundles, trying to repress their sorrow by biting their tongues. However, the enemies chased them wherever they went and gave them a hard time. Finally, they said good-bye to sons and husbands, saw them off to the sacred battle to free the country.

"Our Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army was founded on April 25.

"As the first step, we began this march in order to visit our people groaning in hopelessness and to appeal to them to join us in our fight, and also to consult with them. For this purpose too, we came here, to Chonsangdegi."

He paused and looked at the audience, his face beaming.

Across the audience's minds flashed the scene the other day, how they had received the guerrillas, and they dropped their heads.

Chol Sam pulled a long face so that one could not tell whether he was smiling or weeping. Soon the villagers raised their faces and looked round at each other, embarrassed smiles hovering round their lips. They were scorning their own foolishness.

The most conspicuous smile was that of Se Gol who was lanky and long-necked. At first, as if starting to cough, he covered his mouth with his fist, made a wry face and breathed hard, his shoulders heaving up and down. Then he closed his eyes tightly and huge tears rolled down from the corners. At that moment flames leaping up from the bonfire lit up the two silvery streaks traced by tears on his dark sunburned cheeks. He covered his face immediately and ducked his head so that the people would not see.

"Comrade Cha, that fellow is crying." A soft voice came from behind. Only then did Se Gol himself know he was crying.

On the other hand, Cha Gi Yong, his shoulders bowed, recalled the scene where the villagers had dropped their rakes, forks and sticks on the ground.

Having interrupted his speech to run his eyes over the audience, Comrade Kum Song was recalling the very same scene.

It could be said that at the very moment when they had dropped their tools in the potato field a new life had begun for the people of Chonsangdegi. At the time, however, none of them could possibly have understood that the hour so anxiously awaited by them was approaching.

He cast his glance on Cha Gi Yong, Se Gol and Chol Sam, and then on the women huddled together behind them, and on the rest of the audience, young and old. With a kindly smile on his lips, Comrade Kum Song went on with his speech.

"Yes, you were taken aback, because you did not know us at all. As soon as you saw the armed men, you immediately rang the bell, took refuge or attacked them.

"You did the right thing. You must act like that against the enemy. You must throw yourselves on him, with rakes or forks or anything you can lay hands on. That's how the Korean people should act. If you did not resist the enemy, we would have to shed grievous tears.

"Villagers, you are not empty-handed any longer. Our people have a dependable armed force called the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army."

Comrade Kum Song was about to finish his speech when a sudden commotion was heard from the entrance to the village. Those who had been standing on the edge of the yard craned their necks and started whispering in excitement. They could hear the running footsteps of the sentries who had been on guard round the house.

Presently, from the alley an unknown voice shouted: "Yong Hui's father is coming." Then the voice roared by the yard: "Everybody's coming. Se Gol's uncle, too." There was a stir among the audience. All eyes were on Comrade Kum Song.

He grasped the situation at once. His heart which had been torn at the thought of the people suffering a monstrous disaster now leaped with joyful hope.

Comrade Kum Song hurried through the crowd to reach the entrance to the yard, the people following behind.

The first thing that appeared in the dim moonlight was a stretcher accompanied by Chon Gwang Sik in uniform. Behind him panting as they came were a dozen or so villagers, and armed guerrillas escorted the column at the rear.

On reaching the edge of the yard, the party came to a sud-

den halt. Then the noisy footsteps, heavy breathing and excited whispers subsided and a dead silence ensued. The deep, vast significance of this reunion was felt by the people in their hearts, before the words came. With a surge of gratitude in their burning hearts, the people gazed up at Comrade Kum Song who had brought about this reunion.

The stretcher stopped. The villagers behind it also stopped, solemnly staying in line like soldiers.

With his hand on the leather holster at his side, Chon Gwang Sik stepped forward from the column.

"Comrade Commander!"

He saluted and made his report in a slightly quivering voice: "The company has fulfilled its assignment as ordered."

"Thank you. Is everybody back? How did you meet Yong Hui's father?" Comrade Kum Song asked, taking a step forward and shaking Chon Gwang Sik's hand.

"Everybody is back but two men were wounded while we tried to get them away from the enemy. I'm sorry...."

Conscience-stricken, Chon Gwang Sik paused for a moment, before he described briefly what had happened.

Three days after their departure on the Comrade Commander's orders, the company arrived at the construction site where the villagers had been taken. Since he had known at the outset what had been in the Comrade Commander's mind, Chon Gwang Sik had thought out on the spot a way to save the villagers. Apparently the Japanese were hurrying up the road construction work, but their main units had gone on ahead, so that only a company or so guarded the people at work. The project was intended for reinforcements coming later. A three-man scout team disguised as labourers went among the kidnapped workers, agitating and instructing them. They also met the villagers from Chonsangdegi; they informed them that the guerrillas under General Kum Song's command had come to their village and appealed to them to fight the enemy and escape. These people who had been forced to work were inspired by the news of the guerrilla army and resolved to fight.

The guerrillas raided the Japanese at night and annihilated the enemy which had been thrown into confusion. The people fled in all directions, raising a great outcry. The next day Chon Gwang Sik made a speech to the people who had escaped at an appointed place, and sent them all back home.

Chon Gwang Sik found Yong Hui's father with the people

from Chonsangdegi. They had searched under the cliff. They found the bodies of two Japanese with broken necks and limbs, but he was nowhere to be seen. They spent another day searching for him, and finally spotted him lying on a rock, groaning, with a broken arm and leg. They brought him back on a stretcher.

"...Comrade Commander, they are wounded because I did not organize things carefully enough." Chon Gwang Sik concluded his report in a subdued voice.

"We'll talk about that later. Thank you for what you have done." He said and took another step towards the rescued villagers.

"You all fought well, indeed, bravely. I have been told that because our comrades did not do a good job, two of you are wounded. Let me apologize on their behalf. How anxiously your families have waited for you! Now go ahead and meet them. Yong Hui, your father is back. Go and see him."

He looked for her, stretching out his arms. She was in Chol Sam's arms. However, nobody, not even the little Yong Hui, moved.

A breathless moment of silence followed. All of a sudden, there was the sound of sobbing on the stretcher. Next moment from the road and yard there came tearful cries "General!" mixed with sobbing here and there.

In the yard where the bonfire was burning, everybody was crying. Forgetting to embrace each other, those who had so narrowly escaped death and their families all looked reverently at Comrade Kum Song. However humiliated and oppressed, they had had to bear it all. They had been Koreans lonely like orphans with no one to come to their aid, even when wrongfully beaten and exposed to death. Now they had a father who would share all their grief, all their joys, all their pain and anxieties.

"General!"

"General!"

Voices choking with emotion rang out one after another. This word coming from the depths of their being expressed boundless gratitude to him for saving them from the abyss of death. And it conveyed an ardent desire for the destiny of the whole Korean nation to rest in his hands. At the same time, this was a living demonstration of intense loyalty to him, of respect for and pride in their leader, and their trust in him.

They were too elated even to feel the happiness of their

reunion. The flames of the bonfire flickered against the black nocturnal sky and hot tears melted grudges that had been pent up in their hearts for years. Suddenly Yun Chol Sam got up in the middle of the yard and, raising both hands, shouted: "Long live General Kum Song!"

He was answered by thunderous hurrahs that echoed in the night sky over Chonsangdegi.

"Hurrah, hurrah!" standing on tiptoe and holding up his arms, Se Gol shouted at the top of his voice, the tears running down his cheeks. Yong Hui's father who had been sitting up on the stretcher waved his good hand.

"Long live General Kum Song!" Shouting as loudly as he could, he felt he was bidding farewell to a past of humiliation and agony, and was expressing his great confidence and joy in the future, a future of struggle and hope.

Yong Hui toddled up to the General and tugged at the flaps of his tunic. He gently patted her head while still answering the applause of the people.

Yong Hui held his hand and tugged him over to the stretcher.

"That's my papa. Papa's come," she told him proudly, looking up at him with her twinkling eyes.

"Yes, papa has come. Yong Hui, papa has come, hasn't he?"

Comrade Kum Song picked her in his arms and hugged her, and she put her finger to her lips and broke into a sweet smile, raising her double eyelids. Looking at her lovely innocent smile, he felt a burning in his throat.

Walking on a few steps farther, he placed her in her father's arms. Yong Hui's father said through his tears: "Be a good girl and say hello to the General."

While she gazed up at her father, he turned his weather-beaten face away, breathed deeply, and then buried his face in his hands.

That night Chol Sam did not get to sleep till dawn. When the eastern sky began to pale, he filled a basin with water and took it to a corner of the yard. When he had washed his face, he changed the water to wash his hands, and then again to wash his feet and to clean his pair of rubber shoes.

On entering the room he took his hemp trousers and *turumagi* from the bottom of the chest of drawers, slipped them on and went out.

Dawn was breaking; the sombre grey sky turned silvery white and then gradually was dyed a crimson red.

Chol Sam who had been looking at the eastern sky from a corner of the yard moved his feet together and adjusted the edges of the *turumagi* again.

Soon he raised both hands over his head and looked straight ahead. The early morning rays of the sun were just striking the cap of Mt. Paekdu-san. Its summits rose majestically, reflecting the morning glow. Chol Sam bent down slowly, and made a deep bow right to the ground.

"I wish you a long, long life, General Kum Song."

He put his hands on the ground, palms down, and placed his forehead on the backs of his hands.

"General. From the very bottom of my heart I wish you a long, long life so that you may save our country and us miserable white-clad Koreans from doom."

He had intended to use more solemn words but he could not remember any. The emotions were burning but the right words escaped him.

Even after he had made three deep bows, he remained prostrated for a long time.

Presently he got up slowly, only to flop down in a corner of the yard again.

Soon the sun burst through the thinning cloud, the whole sky wore a crimson veil and in the centre the silvery summits of Mt. Paekdu-san shed their bright rays.

Chol Sam who had been fascinated by the morning glow went to his neighbour.

"High time to come out, man."

Leaning on his stick, he took a walk round his village.

And as the sun rose higher, the guerrillas got ready to leave for Okbawi-gol.

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Se Gol sat down at the table and uncovered his rice-bowl. It was filled with steaming foxtail millet which gave off an appetizing smell. He pressed it with a spoon a few times, took a

spoonful and drank a mouthful of vegetable soup. It was a long time since he last had a meal like this.

He ate several spoonfuls, and then drank water to wash the food down. He stopped drinking, thoughtful for a moment, the water bowl still in his hand. Where would he have got food like this if the General had not come? This bowlful of foxtail millet was more than food, it was the elixir of life which regenerated him.

His spoon shook on the edge of the rice-bowl. Se Gol again started to drink water in great gulps. But he still felt choked, and there was a hot lump in the throat. He put down the spoon, stroked down his chest and pushed the table aside.

"Why don't you eat?" The voice of his aunt came from the kitchen where she had been washing dishes.

"I've had enough."

"But you haven't even eaten half."

"I feel choked and cannot eat any more. I was too hungry to think about it until yesterday but I don't know how to repay his kindness."

"I know how you feel. Your uncle went out early in the morning to do something in return for his kindness.... How nice it would be if I could only knit a pair of socks for him with my hair!"

"I must go to repay him."

"Where to?"

"I must join the guerrilla army."

At this moment he heard the voices of women guerrillas from the next room. He opened the door. Yong Suk was working on her rucksack.

"The...Comrade Yong Suk!"

After a long strain he barely managed the words. He was not used to the word "Comrade". When he had first met her he had called her "Madam" for which she had made fun of him.

"What do you want?" She asked, her eyes flashing, as Se Gol was just giving an embarrassed smile.

"So you are just leaving, without helping me to join the guerrillas, eh?"

"You are on about that again. What do you think I am? I've no right to recruit you to the guerrillas."

Her smiling face was clearly discernible in the gloom.

"You needn't worry about me. I know you have changed your mind. But I'll follow you anyhow. You think I can't walk?"

I can walk as well as any of you guerrillas. If you walk a hundred *ri*, I'll do it too, and if you cover a thousand *ri*, I'll do the same, I can walk with you for a year or even for three years."

Overwhelmed by what Se Gol had said, Yong Suk was at a loss what to do, and finally she consulted with her friends about the matter. She then came out from the adjoining room.

"Comrade Se Gol!"

She called him in a hushed voice by the door of his room. The door was flung open and abruptly Se Gol crossed the threshold. She was startled, and when she had got her breath back she said quietly.

"Let's go."

"What? Seriously?"

A hasty young man, Se Gol jumped out into the yard, without putting on his shoes. She blushed for no good reason. She walked, covering her mouth with the back of her hand and averting her face. They walked side by side to a house in the middle of the village, where the company had made its headquarters.

Before the departure of the unit, the company was sending out three messengers. Han Hung Su accompanied them up to the hillock where the bell tower stood. The Comrade Commander had dispatched the messengers to the places where Song Dok Hyong, Kwon Man Song and Choe Gi Gap were working and to the area to which Li Chol Gun had been assigned to find out how the tasks he had given them at Small Plot were being carried out. The messengers had to visit their respective areas and be back within a month.

All the villagers, young and old, had come out to see the guerrillas off. Among them were the head of the Anti-Imperialist League and the middle-aged chief of the Women's Association, who had been elected the day before.

The guerrillas had started to leave half hour before but they had not been able to reach the outskirts of the village. For each of them was surrounded by three or four people. Old men, women, children accompanied them, holding their hands and chatting to them. The old women would not let go and the children clung to them.

Together with his friends who had been admitted to the guerrilla army, Se Gol exchanged many words of parting with the village folk. His face was flushed. He had been going from house to house, a full rucksack swaying on his back. He had

not been issued a uniform or a rifle, so he wore the working clothes he had used as a lumberjack. He bowed again to his aunt for the last time and asked the villagers to go back.

As Se Gol reached the hillock, the girls waved. He took off his cap and waved back.

"I'm going. I'll be back when we have chased out all the Japs. Farewell."

He turned away, on the verge of tears.

Comrade Kum Song was late in leaving, because he had met one villager after another. He carried little Yong Hui in his arms for quite a way. She wore her rainbow-coloured jacket.

"Look after yourself, Yong Hui."

"I'm coming with you."

"With me? Next time, little one. Today you must say goodbye...."

The smiling Yong Hui, who had been fiddling with a toy, now looked serious, her face clouding.

"I'll be back."

"Soon?"

"Yes, very soon."

Yong Hui smiled happily.

"Yong Hui, how about singing me a song?"

He was so reluctant to part with the child that he put off going as long as he could.

After blinking her eyes and thinking for a minute, she began to move her chubby cheeks.

The revolutionary army has come.

To our village it has come....

She sang with her child's voice.

"Very nice," he said, clapping his hands. She clapped her thin hands too.

He took Yong Hui from Se Gol's aunt again and rubbed his face against hers. Then he walked off.

Yong Hui kept waving her hands and smiling. Carried on a stretcher up to the hillock, Yong Hui's father also waved, and called out his farewells.

The guerrilla army left Chonsangdegi for Okbawi-gol. After that some of them would be leaving for different places to carry on political work in the whole area. Someone would have to go to Fusung to get in touch with all those who had been associat-

ed with *Saenal*, another for Hungtou Mountains and still others to Laoling linked with the Tunghua area.

Han Hung Su walked at the rear of the column, pondering over the mass of work to be done at the next destination.

Spring had come to the vast area around Mt. Paekdu-san.

In the twenties Kim Hyong Jik had ploughed this land and Comrade Kum Song had spread the seeds of the Down-with-Imperialism Union and *Saenal*. This land that had produced that priceless fruit, the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army, would be freshly sown. There would be a boundless field where golden waves would sway and these waves would turn into furious billows that would surge across the three thousand *ri* of homeland.

Imagining each furrow to be running across that field, Han Hung Su looked down at the valley stretching away into the distance. Under his feet thick white clouds floated over the valley. With a faint smile around his lips, he picked a handful of rhododendron leaves and spread them over his head.

Li Chol Gun gripped the long handle of an axe, raised it up high and gave a powerful stroke at the base of a larch tree. Each time the blue blade of the axe cut into it, wood chips as big as the palms of his hands, flew over his shoulders. Cut more than halfway near its root, the tree gave an agonizing creak that rang out through the forest. Beads of sweat flowed down his forehead and his broad chest. At each stroke he let out a stream of hot breath.

He had been felling and carrying trees for five days in succession. His eyes were sunken, his cheeks hollow from the backbreaking work, making his laciturn countenance still grimmer. Sometimes, as he slipped or his arms became limp, the axe would miss the mark and send him reeling. Then it would be a good while before he regained his balance. However, he continued wielding his axe with ferocity, biting his lips.

More than a dozen people were felling trees. The ring of axes was heard all round.

"I've made it!" Li Dong Chon yelled. It was followed by the swishing sound of crashing boughs, and then a heavy thud.

Holding the end of the axe handle, Li Chol Gun wiped the sweat off his forehead with the palm of his hand and looked down.

At the foot of the rise where Li Chol Gun worked, Li Dong Chon was looking round and grinning like a hunter who had caught a tiger.

"How many have you felled?" Although he wasn't far off, Li Dong Chon could barely hear Li Chol Gun's husky voice.

"That was the fifth."

"You are working quickly, man...."

"Shouldn't we shift them now?"

"Let me finish with this one," Li Dong Chon lopped off the branches and top of the tree.

About to raise his axe, Li Chol Gun suddenly felt dizzy and saw flickering stars in front of his eyes. He held on to the

tree trunk to steady himself. It was not the first attack of giddiness.

At dusk, they worked in pairs to carry off the trees on their shoulders. Li Chol Gun had Li Dong Chon for his partner. He led the way, shouldering the bottom. Shouting to each other, the pairs of log carriers went down the hill towards the village where building was in full swing.

The peasants whose houses had been burnt down during the last Japanese "punitive operation" were building new houses on the same site.

On his return from Small Plot, Li Chol Gun had first settled at Yungping a little more than 20 *ri* from Big Valley. Yungping in the Wangching area, in every respect, was the best spot for a guerrilla base.

He always remembered the task Comrade Kum Song had assigned him. First, he was to form a detachment, a company in size, during the summer and then build it up to battalion strength. Second, he was to set up a guerrilla base to cover as wide an area as possible. He had started by rallying small armed groups to form a platoon and getting weapons. Then he had brought together the people scattered over a hundred *ri*. In this way, in keeping with Comrade Kum Song's guideline, he had set out to build up his area politically and militarily first.

He concentrated on one job for days, and then got down to the next. In the daytime he was busy building houses, at night, training the armed unit. And at dawn he would walk 40 or 50 *ri* to visit his friends who were intending to join the guerrillas, or else hold meetings.

The long log swayed at every step. From the top of a mound Li Chol Gun saw everyone, even the children, digging, or carrying away stones.

Suddenly everything went black before his eyes. He took a few more steps, then slipped and fell forward in a faint.

Li Dong Chon dropped the log, and ran to him to help him sit up, holding him by the arms.

"What's wrong?" he asked. Going down the slope, Li Dong Chon had noticed him twisting his feet and staggering.

After a few minutes Li Chol Gun came to and raised his head.

"Comrade Dong Chon, let go, I'm all right."

Worried, Li Dong Chon watched his overtired partner.

"I tripped over a stump and fell, damn it." Li Chol Gun mumbled as if to himself and clapped his hands to shake the dirt off. He looked up with a forced smile, pretending to be quite all right. This cut right through Li Dong Chon's heart.

"I can't see any stump," he said. Of course, there weren't any.

"Comrade Dong Chon, let's stop for a smoke. As you've fallen down, you'd better stay there and rest, as the saying goes. Ha, ha, ha."

"You need a rest anyway." Li Dong Chon answered as he pushed the log aside with his foot, sat down beside it and pulled out his tobacco pouch.

Li Chol Gun raised his shoulders and inhaled deeply and blew out a long cloud of smoke. The bluish smoke wafted past his dark, sunburned forehead and faded into the now purple sky.

He chatted to Li Dong Chon in his usual affectionate way to get off the subject.

"Do stop worrying all the time, Comrade Dong Chon. We'll soon find the time and go to some far-off place to snatch some weapons for ourselves. If we raid the Toljae police station, you should get a pretty good gun. Until then you can borrow one from one of your friends to train with."

"I'm anxious to know when. But I can wait, and I'm not worrying. By the way, I've got something to say."

"Why so formal all of a sudden?"

"You need a really good rest. You're wearing yourself out now."

"A rest?"

"Yes."

"I'm perfectly all right."

Li Chol Gun grinned and winked. At that moment, his eyes alighted on the mountainside across the river, the fresh graves. Whenever he saw that spot, he thought of his mother and brother. Then his face would flush and his whole body would break out in sweat.

"Look, Comrade Dong Chon. We can't do things the easy way. How can we take a rest? You know we can't."

"I know full well what you mean, but still you must take care of yourself."

"I thank you for worrying about me, but seriously, how can I rest?"

He suddenly remembered the night he had spent at Small Plot recently.

"Comrade Dong Chon! Some time ago the Comrade Commander said that when you are experiencing difficulties, you must think of our usurped homeland, of our people who are shedding tears of blood. Look at the valley. Who is sleeping there?"

As he uttered these words he felt his eyes become blurred and quickly turned his face away.

"I know. But... what good will it do to grieve?"

Li Dong Chon rolled and lit another cigarette and with a sigh blew out a cloud of smoke.

"By the way, you see the Comrade Commander quite often, I believe?"

"Yes, I meet him from time to time."

"How many times have you met him?"

"Well, I've met him since I joined the Revolutionary Army at Chialun."

"That's a great honour. When I get a gun, I'll shoulder it and go and see the Comrade Commander."

"That's a good idea."

"I often dream of it."

"Your dream will certainly come true. Well, shall we get going?"

They rose to their feet, lifting the log onto their shoulders.

Pak Gi Nam was doing an important job at the building site. He sat on the edge of the roof, driving in the cramp irons. He shouted at the people below to send up timber for the rafters.

"We mustn't make a rough job of it because we think there'll be another 'punitive operation'. Now, let's have that one over there." The timber for the rafters was lifted up over the walls of the log cabin.

No sooner had Li Chol Gun dropped the log beside a pile of dirt and turned round, than he was surrounded by several people. A tall man from Big Valley, his straw hat pulled down over his eyes, had brought him a message that he must come over on urgent business; another youth standing to the right, who was in leggings, told him that the platoon was waiting for him in the mountain for military training, while a woman in a hood—her name was Gop Dan—asked him to speak at a meeting called by the Women's Association that night. He listened to them all, roared with laughter and said cheerfully.

"I'll come. But will you tell them that I can't get to Big Valley before dawn."

All the messengers dealt with, he picked up a saw and started sawing a log. As he pulled the saw, the ground became covered with white sawdust.

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"Just look at it! This Palace of the Proletariat leaks."

Pulling a wry face, and with a cigarette between his lips, Pak Gi Nam wiped the back of his neck with his hand.

Li Chol Gun laughed. He was in his undershirt, sewing up a tear in his tunic sleeve.

"Well, it's the rainy season," he said.

They had settled down in this cavern in a mountain behind Yungping. If one turned off at a nearby mountain, one could see the three log cabins where a platoon of 16 men lived. There were eight such armed groups in the Wangching area.

An oil lamp hung on the wall, with an empty kerosene box upside-down underneath it. Here they would meet to discuss their work and sleep on mattresses. They had just spent several hours discussing how to get weapons.

"Comrade Chol Gun, shouldn't we go down to the village in a few days? I think it's high time we formally occupied the area."

Pak Gi Nam would often tease Li Chol Gun, but when it came to official matters, he made a point of treating him with deference, as befitting his lieutenant, though he was two years his junior.

"I've no objections. But I'm afraid the enemy will come on a 'punitive operation' very soon."

"Certainly we must be cautious, but if we lack boldness, our losses may well be the greater."

"There is a big difference between courage and recklessness. The police we can deal with quite easily. But the Ranam Regiment I'm not so sure about. Let's send out a few men to scout around. Maybe tomorrow."

"Let's. But when shall we hit those foul running dogs? We must exercise our rule over them and occupy their places...."

"We could go into the offensive any moment now, so long as the 'punitive forces' are not likely to pour in here."

Having fixed his tunic sleeves, Li Chol Gun emerged from the cave. He was going to take a look at the log cabins where the platoon was billeted, when Li Dong Chon, his shoulders slightly bent forward, came into sight.

"Where are you going, Comrade Dong Chon?" Li Chol Gun called out.

Li Dong Chon looked up and saluted his superior in a flurry.

Only 19, he looked four or five years older.

"I'm going to the blacksmith's."

"What for?"

"Er, I want to sharpen this spear." Li Dong Chon took off his spear with a leather strap, held it in the other hand, and grinned awkwardly.

"I'm afraid you won't do much with that. It's too short and the point is blunt," said Li Chol Gun, feeling the spear-head. "Still, until you are issued a gun, you'll have to make do with this. It can't be helped. When will you be back?"

"In a couple of hours," said Li Dong Chon looking up at the sun.

"Don't be late, because you're on guard duty tonight."

"I know."

Li Chol Gun stood watching until Li Dong Chon had vanished down the slope. He was one of the five guerrillas who had not got guns yet.

After leaving his superior, Li Dong Chon hurried down the slope on his unusually lanky legs in the direction of the blacksmith's on the outskirts of the village.

"Uncle in?"

He raised the straw mat in the doorway and stepped inside. A cloud of hot steam hit him in the face and there was the pungent smell of charcoal.

"What brings you here?" Stripped to the waist by the forge, the blacksmith Hak Chun looked up at his visitor, his hammer still in his hand. On the anvil there was a red hot hoe blade.

"I want you to do me a favour."

"What can I do for you, Dong Chon?"

Hak Chun spat on the hammer handle and started ham-

mering again with his muscular arms. After rolling the blade, he plunged it once more into the red hot coals and got to his feet.

"Blow hard," he told his son of about 15, as he went over to the water jug in the corner.

The boy went on working the bellows, bending and stretching, his hands holding on to the forge. As the bellows sent out air, flames shot out of the red hot coals.

Li Dong Chon unbuckled his spear, leaned it against the forge and went over to the boy.

"Let me take a turn."

It was an unlooked-for piece of luck for the boy, who darted outside, leaving the forge to the visitor.

Hak Chun took his kerchief from his head and wiped the drips of water off his chin and the sweat off the back of his neck.

"Could you forge a good spearhead for me, Uncle?"

"If you are a guerrilla now, you need a gun. You can't do much with a bit of metal on a stick. I heard that the soldiers of the Independence Army would give an ox for a gun...."

"We don't buy them; we take them from the Japs."

"Take them from them? How?"

"Any way we can. We bash their faces in with our fists, hit them with stones or knock them down and sit on them; we'll break their necks the way we kill chickens...."

"My gosh! How grand you are!" The blacksmith laughed heartily and asked: "So you are going to knock one down with your spear?"

"Of course. But why does your place look so empty?"

"Business is slack. I can't even afford to pay for charcoal. Well, what are you guerrillas going to do? Are you going to give up farming to make a revolution?"

"That can't be. Even while we make a revolution, we still have to eat."

"I'm not so sure of that. Your mother came to see me yesterday and told me that she'd give up farming because you are always out. And she said that whenever Choe Dok Man sees her, he makes a big fuss, tells her to keep you home, to persuade you to work."

"We needn't take any notice of him. He's only kicking up a fuss because he thinks I'm still his bondsman."

"Why, you are a different man now, Dong Chon."

"No, I'm not. The revolution is necessary for us poor folk to become the masters of society."

"Revolution is a good thing anyhow. But what is the revolution going to do with us blacksmiths?"

"You too must work for the revolution, Uncle, by forging. The guerrillas are talking about you a lot; they say they badly need your help."

"My help?"

"Yes. You must help forge our spearheads and repair our guns."

"Is that so? Well, I'm not a good-for-nothing at any rate. If you want to get something done, you have to heat your iron."

Hak Chun grinned, showing his yellow teeth.

Li Dong Chon worked the bellows while Hak Chun pulled out the hot blade with his tongs and hammered it.

"How do you want me to shape your spearhead?"

"Long, two hand-spans and more. So that when I drive it into a Jap's chest, it comes out through his back. And please make it a bit thick."

When he had finished with the hoe blade, Hak Chun went through a wooden box of iron pieces, found a suitable bit and stuck it in the fire. As soon as the iron was hot, he put it on the anvil and yelled: "Hit it quick!"

Li Dong Chon wielded the hammer and the piece of iron stretched, giving off sparks.

"Hit it hard! Hard!" Hak Chun commanded Li Dong Chon, who raised the hammer high and rained powerful blows on the metal.

After the fourth round of hammering, the iron was rolled out. Then Hak Chun trimmed the edges and sharpened the blade.

Hak Chun dipped the forged spearhead into the water and held it there for a while. Then he threw it in front of the anvil.

"That's it. You can take it."

Li Dong Chon waited for it to cool and replaced the old spearhead with the new one. He put a ring round the top of the spear handle and sharpened the spearhead on a whetstone.

"This is wonderful. With this I can stab three Japanese at one time." Li Dong Chon couched the spear and made a movement of thrusting it forward.

"Oh, oh. You'll kill me, man. Turn it the other way." Hak Chun dodged the make-believe thrust, jerking his ash-covered head backward.

Dong Chon laughed out loud, stroking his perspiring chest.

"I'm not stupid enough to hurt you, Uncle."

"Don't say that. That piece of iron hasn't got eyes."

Hak Chun grinned, puffing hard at his huge pipe.

Dong Chon promised to repay the blacksmith for his generous help and went out. He had intended to go straight back to the mountain but changed his mind and took himself off towards the village. He had nothing special to do, he just wanted to take a walk round the place.

He strolled along, occasionally glancing up at the spear-head which shone in the evening sun.

When he went past the rice mill, Dong Chon met the woman who lived next door to him. She was carrying a water jar.

"How do you do, Song Nam's aunt?" He greeted her, straightening up his spear—which was by no means heavy.

"Why, aren't you Gwang Chon's brother?"

The woman, who looked under 30 and wore a slightly faded light green jacket, paused, round-eyed.

"Why are you surprised?" Dong Chon asked, grinning.

"I didn't recognize you, honest, I didn't. Song Nam told me that you were a guerrilla now but I wondered what he was talking about. In your uniform you really look like a...."

"You're a member of the Women's Association, aren't you?"

"I'm a member all right, but I can't do much."

"Of course you can. Women will have equal rights with men."

"That's what they say, but women are women."

"You obviously haven't learnt much yet." And Li Dong Chon painstakingly explained what he could about the equality of the sexes.

Meanwhile, a few housewives passed them on their way to fetch water for supper, and glanced over at Dong Chon.

"You too should cut your hair short, put on a uniform and fight with a gun."

"Good Gracious! Cut off my bun? What a horrible suggestion!"

"I hope you aren't offended."

When Song Nam's aunt was gone, an oxcart rumbled out of the side-road behind the rice mill. It was fully loaded with a dresser, cooking pots, a kerosene box, straw bags and other household things, and three children huddled in the corner.

A man of about 40 was driving and a middle-aged woman with a bundle on her head and a baby on her back followed behind.

Dong Chon got out of their way on a rise. But in a minute he saw another, similar party on the road. The driver looked as if he was going to say something, but didn't open his lips.

"Where are you from?" Dong Chon spoke first.

"Whoa, whoa!"

The driver drew rein and brought the cart to a halt, took his kerchief off his head and replied.

"From Sinsong-dong."

"You look as if you are moving house."

"Right. The Japs are giving us such a tough time that we can't go on living there."

"You look like a peasant. Have you given up your farm?"

"No good worrying about that now. It's our lives that are at stake. The Japs come every other day, shoot some of us and set fire to our houses."

"You think you'll be safe here?" asked Dong Chon intentionally.

"They say that there are guerrillas here and the Japanese can't carry out their outrages at will. Am I right?"

"Well, I think you are right."

Parting with the oxcart, Dong Chon walked leisurely in its wake.

In the last few days there had been an increasing number of people coming in.

A rumour had spread far and wide that a guerrilla zone was being established, and some came to find a livelihood, others to take refuge from the punitive forces. People were flocking in from all directions. Some moved in with kith and kin, others came to take a look first. On the other hand, some were disappearing from the place. There had been a lot of coming and going.

Until the previous spring the village had been deserted, but now it was seething in the whirlwind of revolution.

Li Dong Chon walked right through the village, talking

to everyone he met. He was thirsty for news. Although he had only gone to the mountain 15 days ago, it seemed like years to him.

As he walked into the yard of his house fenced with rotten millet stalks, his mother, who had been winnowing outside the kitchen door, looked up.

Her son looked a different man now, and she put aside the winnowing-fan and went to him.

"How's everything, Mother?"

"All right! Whatever have you been doing for the last ten days and more?"

Her eyes were brimming with tears as if she had met him after years of separation.

"You know what I've been doing. A soldier cannot come and go as he wishes."

He took the spear off his shoulder, held it in front of him and looked around. In a corner of the yard there was an unfamiliar A-frame carrier, and there were several strange pairs of straw sandals on the earthen porch.

"Your uncle's family came today."

"What?!"

At that moment, his uncle and aunt opened the door and came out.

Li Dong Chon bowed to them in greeting.

Stocky and square-faced, Dong Chon's uncle never stood on ceremony. He explained why he and his family had left their home so hurriedly.

They had lived some 40 *ri* away. His uncle rented a tract of land and fetched firewood to support his family of five. He said that ten days ago Jap soldiers with yellow stars on their caps had surged into his village and put up tents. A large force of policemen herded out the villagers for forced labour. The peasants had to stop farming to get firewood for the Japanese and carry their loads. They would kick the Koreans on any pretext and threaten to behead them with their sabres. For some days they would be out on a mission, allegedly to mop up Communists, and then return with sore feet. Then they would go from house to house, shooting chickens, pigs and sheep indiscriminately. His uncle said he had narrowly escaped to the mountain at midnight.

"You acted quite correctly. You must join the revolution. It's the only way to live."

Li Dong Chon said it with a dignified air, as if he knew everything that was happening around him.

Rubbing his dark-bearded chin, his uncle said that he was at his wit's end, and that the revolution was his only hope.

"You are welcome here. A good world will come. You just settle down here and join the revolution. We are doing a big job now. We are planning to form many guerrilla units to hit at the Japanese army. We'll have to shoot those who invaded your village and send them to hell. You know who our leader is? General Kum Song himself. You've heard of him, of course?"

"Of course! I've come here to be with General Kum Song."

"Big news will soon reach there, too."

"Not only I but all our villagers will be coming here."

"Those who are coming must come soon, and those who are leaving, must go soon. Then everything'll be settled. This is the trend of the revolution."

"Well, where is General Kum Song now?"

"Why, Uncle, you must be careful in asking such a question. If the information reaches a spy's ears, it might end badly. Anyway, I don't know his whereabouts...." Li Dong Chon said this in a reverent tone and refused to speak any more. As far as he knew, General Kum Song must be in the vicinity of Mt. Paekdu-san.

"Now, you've many soldiers and weapons, I believe?"

"Many? Oh, no. We've just made a start."

"A start?"

Li Dong Chon became slightly sullen as he glanced at his sharpened spearhead.

Instantly perceiving this, the uncle said in a soothing tone of voice.

"Well begun is half done, as they say. You can't fill your stomach in a single bite, can you? Work steadily. The General will guide you anyway."

His mother listened to him while winnowing, and as soon as there was a break in the conversation, she turned an anxious look at Dong Chon.

"Things are pretty bad, son. Here you are talking about revolution, as if this world could be overthrown in a few days, meanwhile Old Choe is getting more and more arrogant. He comes here every day demanding that I pay my debts. He says I must find you and drag you home."

"The old fogey is still hanging around?"

"Still hanging around? He's swaggering around as if he is going to take it out of us."

"That's why I came home today. I'm going to him right away to teach him a good lesson."

"Talk of the devil! Here he comes."

Winking at her son, she shook the winnowing-fan as if nothing had happened.

Choe Dok Man's loud coughing was audible over near the wattle gate.

"Well, what the hell are you going to do, hum?"

In a ramie jacket and trousers as thin as the wings of a cicada, Choe Dok Man shook his bulrush fan.

"What's the matter with you, old man?" retorted Li Dong Chon, turning on his heel.

"Don't shout, son...." His mother cautioned him, and then pushed the winnowing-fan aside and went towards the visitor, tucking up her long skirt.

"Wait, Mother. I'll deal with him."

"Deal with him? The debtor is always in the wrong, as the saying goes."

"Don't be so weak-kneed, Mother. Come back here. I'll handle him."

Dong Chon put his spear down on the threshold and stepped towards the corner of the yard.

"Oh, so you are at home, are you, eh? About time. Now, tell me. I lent you some sacks of millet for your farm. And you aren't weeding a single furrow. Where the devil have you been loafing about? And so many mouths to fill. The foxtail millet field is turning into wasteland while you go gadding about. What are you going to do in the autumn?"

"Why are you shouting at me?"

Dong Chon stood in the visitor's way, stretching his legs. Only then did Choe Dok Man realize that Dong Chon's attitude had changed, and he looked at him round-eyed. Dong Chon had worked for Choe Dok Man until the year before as a servant, and until three or four months ago, he had been as submissive as a sheep.

Dong Chon thrust out his chest and approached the landlord with a belligerent air. Choe Dok Man looked him up and down. He wore a thick cotton uniform dyed with black walnut liquid, with greenish gaiters and cap.

"Why should I not complain? If our farming is spoilt, you'll starve and I'll be ruined; that's no good for either of us. Just think of it. In these critical days...."

With a bald forehead and protruding jaw, Choe Dok Man was flushed with anger.

"Why do you try to order me about? Don't you know that times have changed, old man?"

"Times changed?"

Choe Dok Man was indeed aware of changes but he simply could not credit what he saw.

"So you think I'm still your servant? Why do you go on bragging like that? Who the hell do you think you are? Whether I weed or sleep is none of your business."

Li Dong Chon took another step and unfastened two tunic buttons.

"You are not my servant any more, but you are still my tenant. And that won't change if the sky falls in."

"Not if the sky falls in? Have you never heard of the revolution?"

"What about it? Even you Communists must keep up some sense of decency. I've provided you with precious grain every year so you don't starve. And now you talk of revolution. Does your revolution teach you to return evil for good?"

"Oh, what a man! Who helped whom? I helped you with backbreaking labour, I even fetched your firewood to keep you warm. Have you ever weeded a furrow or fetched a single bundle of firewood?"

"Why should I? I own land and I have money...."

"Look, old man. The revolution will sweep away all your account books. You'd better give up your land. We will certainly take back our property from you."

"Take back your property? Pshaw! You hooligans! My son lives a stone's throw away; he's strong. Don't you know the police inspector at Ryongdure Street? My son is police inspector. Aren't you afraid of the law, you bastard? The law, I tell you. The law!"

"Who are you calling bastard? I guess you need to taste our dictatorship. Your law is like a worn-out pair of shoes, but we have our dictatorship."

"Dictatorship? What your stinking shit is about, you bastard?"

Li Dong Chon's face reddened in fury. He whirled round and picked up his spear from the threshold.

"Son!"

His mother barred his way.

"Get out of my way, Mother. He's a reactionary. His kind join hands with the Japanese and give us Koreans a hard time. Hey, old fogey, don't you run away. Come here. I'll give you a taste of our dictatorship."

Unsuccessful, Choe Dok Man hurriedly disappeared behind the house, the shuffling of his leather shoes gradually fading away.

"Look, son. Why do you quarrel with the old man? Once on bad terms with him nobody will be safe...." Dong Chon's mother said in a tearful voice, gripping her son's hand as he was about to pursue the landlord.

"Mother, as I said just now, the world has changed. We've been bowing and scraping too much to these people. We needn't do so any more because our day has come. The whole of this area will be our revolutionary base. Our enemies will be powerless before us. We are going to build a world where we can do anything we want."

"Well, when our day comes, it'll be a different matter. Didn't you hear him? You know his son has the authority to arrest and kill innocent people."

"You just wait and see. We'll arrest his son, the Japanese dog, and put him on trial.... Police inspectors are nothing. The revolution will sweep them away like dust. Cheer up, Mother. You should be proud of your son—now a member of the powerful guerrilla army."

Li Dong Chon sat on the earthen porch, taking deep puffs at his cigarette. His shoulders rose and fell with anger.

As he became calmer, he talked to his uncle. The time approached when he had to leave; so he hurried to the mountain, though he had been invited to stay at home for supper.

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"So you gave him a taste of our dictatorship, did you?" asked Li Chol Gun, with a grin.

"I had no time to, he turned tail and ran."

Li Chol Gun laughed out loud, tossing back his head. Though not an easy laughter, he was so tickled at Dong Chon's story that he held his sides. Li Dong Chon joined him laughing, scratching his neck the while.

"Did you make this yourself?"

"Uncle Hak Chun did."

"Splendid. This is much better than the bayonet on the 38-rifle."

Li Chol Gun was going to tell him to borrow a gun for his sentry duty, but had not the heart to, because the young man was so proud of his spear.

The moon was bright. The mountain ridges were whitish silver, covered with alders and birch trees. A cock crowed twice down below in the village.

After exchanging a few more words with Li Dong Chon, Li Chol Gun was about to go to the western sentry post, when Li Dong Chon suddenly asked him.

"Comrade Li Chol Gun, will you send me to school after the revolution?"

"School?"

"Yes."

"Which school?"

"Any school. I'm unhappy because I'm not educated enough. Today I just shouted at old man Choe Dok Man because I couldn't express myself well."

"So you want to go to school to learn to speak?"

"No. What I'd really like to learn is how to farm. So that I can help everybody to grow enough to eat their fill. I'd like to learn how to grow a bean as big as your fist."

"Fine. But, right now you'd better study how to replace your spear with a gun. What do you say?"

Li Dong Chon again put his hand on the back of his neck.

"If you give me three days, I think I can get one."

"Wait a few more days. We'll go after some."

"Really?"

"Why not?"

"That'd be wonderful!"

His inspection finished, Li Chol Gun went along the mountain ridge to the western sentry post, leaving Li Dong Chon alone.

Li Dong Chon rolled a cigarette and sat on a stone. A bluish cloud of smoke floated up over his shoulder.

He recalled what he had done that day. It had been a busy, turbulent day. He had got up early for shooting practice, fetched water from the stream up at the mountain ridge, and attended a discussion on "What Is the Revolution". Then he had carried a message to Pak Gi Nam, and been enthralled by his lengthy explanation of what the dictatorship of the proletariat meant. Image followed image in his mental kaleidoscope; Uncle Hak Chun, the smithy, his startled uncle by his mother's side, Song Nam's aunt, Choe Dok Man's distorted face.

He stamped out his cigarette and looked down the mountain. The plain was fast asleep—there was not even the hum of insects.

He held up his spear in the moonlight.

"Soon I'll change this for a gun. A heavy rifle butt and a shining barrel. Then, when I pull the trigger, the rifle will recoil on my shoulder and send out a bullet. There'll be an acrid smell of gun powder, and the enemies'll hold up their hands, scream and fall down."

All of a sudden, he saw his spear as a mysterious magic wand. It seemed to him that once he wielded it, he could flatten the crests of the mountains and cliffs. And if he drew a line with the spear point across the field, he could create a fathomless abyss or a river, or harness the waters.

Li Dong Chon rolled and lit another cigarette. It was just fancy, but goodness knows why he was so elated; he felt capable of doing anything. "Li Chol Gun laughed just now when I asked him to send me to school—not because my request was so fantastic but because he was very glad that's what I wanted.

"Mother was really surprised to see me with the home-made spear. How will she react when she sees me with a real gun or in a student's uniform? Maybe she won't recognize her own son."

"Ahem!"

Intoxicated by his own dreams, Li Dong Chon felt his heart warm and he cleared his throat.

The next moment he was gripped by a burning desire to see the General. "I'll stand at attention before him with a

gun on my shoulder and salute. Then, what will he say to me? He may pat me on the shoulder and say I look splendid...."

Li Dong Chon got to his feet, stood erect, clicking his heels. The thought pleased him. With a grin on his face, he looked round.

At that moment he heard the rumble of an oxcart though the track was way below where he was standing. He listened with straining ears and bated breath. Yes, it was an oxcart. No doubt about it. Immediately he became excited, thinking it was suspicious. Suddenly he saw flames rise up behind the village. The flames spread fast and in a few seconds lit up the whole night sky.

"Isn't that my wheat field?"

He stretched himself to gaze at the fire below. Now he was certain that it was his field on fire.

"Fire! Fire!" Shouting, he ran towards the platoon barracks. By the time the guerrillas came rushing out, the villagers were making for the field, shouting, "Fire! Fire!"

The guerrillas ran down to the burning field across the maize field. But Li Dong Chon took a short cut through the oat field. He was about to cross the cart road when he caught sight of something dark, a loaded oxcart.

"Who goes there?"

The unknown figure gave no answer to his loud challenge. Probably he was scared out of his wits. Li Dong Chon took another step forward and challenged again: "Who goes there? Hands up!" He couched his spear ready for action. Then came the report of a gun and there was a flash before his eyes. A dark figure ran down into the bean field, firing a pistol. Li Dong Chon stopped by the slope and shook his head. His ears were ringing and he felt dizzy but he wasn't hurt.

He gave up the chase, and caught another figure moving by the cart by the neck.

"It's me. Me!"

"Who's me?"

"Me, Song Nam. Aren't you Dong Chon?"

"Who was that making a getaway?"

"Choe Dok Man's second son set fire to the wheat field and fired his pistol and...."

"Oh, did he? And where are you going?"

There was a rustling sound from the top of the cart covered with foxtail millet straws.

"Old Dok Man is up there. He and his son intimidated me at gunpoint into leading the way and...."

Song Nam, Choe Dok Man's servant, was in tears as he explained, trying to keep his voice down to a whisper.

"So that's what he's done."

Li Dong Chon asked Song Nam to pull down all the bundles of straw. Song Nam did, revealing a dark figure curled up under a blanket.

"Clever, aren't you? Set fire to ripe wheat and run for it, would you? Now, I'll send you to hell. Don't just sit down there like a clod. Come down and be quick about it!"

The sound of shots had brought three guerrillas running to the scene.

Choe Dok Man crawled out, trembling and still covering himself with the blanket. The cart was piled up with luggages and bundles. They searched the cart but found no one else.

"So where do you think you're going, dressed like a ghost?"

As Li Dong Chon yelled, stretching his legs, Choe Dok Man stepped back, frightened.

"Where are you going, I asked."

"Tongduchon," returned Choe Dok Man coolly, with a hostile glare.

"But why did you burn the field?"

"It's my land. I can do what I like with it."

"What?"

Li Dong Chon hit the old man in the face with his clenched fist.

The old man collapsed, crying out, but Li Dong Chon kicked him mercilessly.

"Whose land, you bastard? Did you sow the wheat in that field?"

Li Chol Gun came running over. Taking in the situation immediately, he ordered Li Dong Chon to stop beating the landlord and to tie him up. Li Dong Chon cut a piece of rope from the oxcart and tied the landlord's wrists behind his back.

"You counterrevolutionary, you've been arrested by the guerrilla army. Yesterday I tried to give you a little taste of our dictatorship, but it was late. But it is not too late now." Li Dong Chon said this with disgust, his eyes glinting with blue fire.

He asked Song Nam to turn the oxcart round and, on Li

Chol Gun's orders, escorted Choe Dok Man to the cave. After a good while, as they were climbing up the slope, Li Dong Chon said to Li Chol Gun who was behind him.

"It's very upsetting. If I'd acted quick enough, I could have got a pistol without difficulty. But I was too stupid to know what would happen."

"You were lucky, anyway. The landlord might have shot you."

Choe Dok Man stumbled over the root of a tree and fell, but wouldn't get up. Li Dong Chon pulled him up.

"Now, old man, you understand how hard it was for me when I had to walk up this road twice a day to fetch your firewood in the mountains? Hurry up and stop making such a fuss, you old dotard!"

When they reached the cave, Pak Gi Nam ran up, gasping for breath. He had gone down to put out the fire, and hadn't had time to put on his tunic.

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People came in and out continuously through the big front gate of Choe Dok Man's house.

The curious villagers came to see what had happened. They had never expected the change to come so quickly.

Pak Gi Nam changed into his uniform and settled himself in a sunny and cozy room at the end of the house. He had the glittering wardrobe and chest of drawers as well as the huge framed picture of the Virgin Mary taken out. They also took out a mirror the height of a man, with carved legs that looked like lion's paws.

"Comrade So Guk Bo! Take out everything luxurious and extravagant. We, the proletariat, have nothing to do with stuff like this. Their stinking bourgeois smell makes me sick."

Pak Gi Nam, his forehead shining, went from room to room, giving instructions to the guerrillas and passionately explaining something to them.

So Guk Bo, who was in charge of propaganda for the Anti-Imperialist League sweated freely as he rearranged the room.

"Now Korean independence is not far off, Mr. Pak," So

Guk Bo said jokingly, after walking round uncertainly for a while in the large, empty room.

"Mr. Pak?"

Pak Gi Nam, who had been hanging a huge map of Korea on the wall, turned round and grimaced.

"I thought you were rather revolutionary, but I find there is still something hackneyed about you."

"What do you mean?" So Guk Bo asked, unabashed.

"What do I mean? Just a minute. Hold this for me first."

Pak Gi Nam got So Guk Bo to hold the edge of the map so that he could spread it out and pin it on the wall.

"Look! How wonderful our homeland is! It's so noble and beautiful...."

Forgetting to explain why he thought So Guk Bo was hackneyed, Pak Gi Nam stood gazing at the Korean peninsula, sublimely happy.

"How nice it would be if we could chase the aggressors out of here and build communism! Well, we've made a good start. Right now, we've occupied this stinking landlord's room. But in the future, we shall be working in a great resplendent palace built by the proletariat. How wonderful that will be! Often I think of the future and get so excited I can't sleep."

He took two steps back, his eyes still glued to the map. He looked really fascinated.

So Guk Bo had had little schooling and could barely read simple Korean sentences. Unaccustomed to the difficult abstract phrases Pak was using, he was rather bewildered, though he did roughly get the meaning.

When he had finished with the map, Pak Gi Nam thought about what he should do next, bending his head on one side. But he was not sure what else needed doing.

Now there was just a round table in the spacious room, with a red banner on one wall and a map on the other.

"This will do. Now the room looks like the revolutionary headquarters for this area."

Pak Gi Nam laughed boisterously, while So Guk Bo in his loose cotton trousers went out of the gate, carrying water pails.

Then one of the guerrillas came in, saluted and made a report.

"We've arrested Choe Dok Man's son."

"You have? Where has he been hiding?"

"Under a bristletooth oak tree on the mountain like a hen pheasant."

"Well done. He didn't resist?"

"We threatened him with our guns and he couldn't do a thing."

"Did you disarm him?"

"Yes, indeed."

"Fine. That's the dictatorship of the proletariat. We have the dictatorship in our hands. And what about the rest of the gang?"

"We are going out after them now."

"You must be merciless anyhow. Arrest every landlord, who lets out land, regardless of how much. It's not a question of quantity but quality. A man who lets out even a *pyong* of land is our enemy, for he has exploited our poor, bonded peasants. You must throw aside so-called humanitarianism and sympathy. You must be cool but merciless. The classics say: 'Fundamentally speaking, political power is the organized force of one class to repress another.' Understand? Comrade Choe! Ah, you too are Choe, eh? I fear you may compromise because he has the same surname as you. No compromises. Right?"

Despite his jocular tone, Pak Gi Nam didn't miss the point.

"My surname is Choe all right, but my family background is different from Choe Dok Man's."

"That's good. In any case, you must be unmerciful in the class struggle. Right. Carry on."

After the guerrilla called Choe had left, Li Chol Gun came in. In the night he had made a routine inspection near Big Valley, and now looked exhausted. He walked onto the veranda and was taken aback to see the room. The atmosphere was so completely different from the cave.

"Why are you surprised?" asked Pak Gi Nam, uneasy. This was because Li Chol Gun had been unhappy about almost everything Pak had done, and he might well criticize what he had done that day. However, Pak showed confidence as he made his report in detail about the arrest of the landlords and the information obtained by the scouts he had sent out towards Huaigu.

"Because I'm deeply impressed. If I have to express an

opinion, well, I thought this house would be suitable for a school, but since it has been made...."

Li Chol Gun grinned, raising his bushy eyebrows.

"Isn't it a bit early to start educational work? We don't have full control of the area yet, do we?"

"Yes. We do. We are in complete control here."

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That night they set out on the raid they had long planned. They were going to cover 80 *ri* to attack a police station for weapons.

Five people in ordinary clothes trekked over the ridge-ways.

When they got to a spot where Toljae police station could be seen right below them, they made a brief halt to prepare for action.

Li Chol Gun was in charge of the operation.

They crouched down in a field overgrown with wormwood bushes and looked down at the police station building. Bright electric light shone through the windows.

Pak Gi Nam's report on reconnaissance information had shown that the bulk of the force were out on a routine inspection, leaving only a dozen or so armed policemen at the station, of whom two or three stood on guard at night. To get into the armoury you had to go through a corridor and turn off at the corner of the jail. The key to the iron door was held by a policeman on duty, and there were an estimated 20 guns there.

They would have to work carefully and pay special attention to the high watch tower in front of the station and the telephone line that could be used for an emergency call.

As he considered the combat operation before them, Li Chol Gun suddenly became worried by a number of dubious points.

First, he wondered whether midnight was the best time. Then he wondered if they could raid the police station just with two pistols loaded with six bullets. There was yet another point which he felt uneasy about, that was, how accurate the

reconnaissance information had been. But it was too late to start worrying about such trifles now.

Pak Gi Nam sensed what was running through Li Chol Gun's mind. He was about to say something, but stopped when Li Chol Gun regained his self-confidence. Pak Gi Nam saw that too many explanations could have a reverse effect. Li Chol Gun was a modest man who usually took note of the opinions of others. But he would, at times, reject them categorically, with "I disagree" or "That's only empty talk." Pak had sometimes experienced this, and knew that Li Chol Gun was like a river, quiet on the surface but whirling underneath.

Sitting there quietly Li Chol Gun could foresee each phase of the forthcoming combat action. On entering the street, the "tinker" working underground there would lead the way and hand them a pair of pliers to cut the barbed wire and telephone line. Signals would be made with a lighted cigarette. Li Chol Gun would have to take on the most important job of eliminating the sentry. The minute they had the guns out, they must be carried up the mountains. He went carefully over every detail that he felt uneasy about. Then, feeling the dagger and pistol at his side, he set his mind at rest.

"Comrade Pak. You must jump in through the window and get the key from the man on duty."

"I understand."

Pak Gi Nam pulled out his pistol and released the safety catch.

Accompanied by Li Dong Chon, Li Chol Gun went into the street first. When he signalled with his lighted cigarette, they heard the clanging of a bell near a bar at the corner of the street and a dark figure with a load on his back came into sight. Li Chol Gun flew to the "tinker". In a few minutes Li Dong Chon had climbed the pole and cut the telephone line. Meanwhile Li Chol Gun cut the barbed wire on the top of the wall, that could have been electrified.

Having done this, he scaled the wall and flattened himself up against the entrance to the building and peeped into the room for a second. A sentry with a rifle slung on his shoulder, was stamping his feet, mumbling. He seemed to be wiping the dirt off his shoes after routine inspection.

The powerful electric light shone through the open windows lighting up the area as bright as day. But there was no

movement on the watch tower about which he had been worrying.

As Pak Gi Nam leaped into the room through the window, Li Chol Gun crashed through the door and sprung towards the slender policeman carrying a rifle. Caught unawares, the latter wheeled round and aimed his bayonet. But Li Chol Gun grabbed the barrel of his gun, and as the policeman staggered forward, struck a blow at his chest with his fist. He fell down sideways, and Dong Chon got astride and strangled him.

Meanwhile, as soon as he had jumped through the window, Pak Gi Nam pointed his pistol at a young policeman in spectacles sitting at his desk writing. He held up his hands like a lost soul.

"Hand over your gun and you'll be safe," said Pak Gi Nam in fluent Japanese. "Give me the key to the armoury."

Carrying the rifle he had wrested from the sentry Dong Chon was standing with his back against the wall near the telephone, while Li Chol Gun stood by the windowsill to keep an eye on the outside.

"Hurry up with that key!" Pak Gi Nam again urged the fellow in spectacles. With his hands held up high, he said that the key was with his colleague at the entrance, who now lay face downwards on the cement floor. Li Chol Gun took the key out of the man's pocket and opened up the armoury. A dozen or so rifles were neatly stacked against the wall. Dong Chon dived in, got his arms round the lot and came out into the corridor. At that moment a shot thundered out.

Li Chol Gun whirled round to see the fellow in spectacles yelling something. He thought Pak Gi Nam had fired his pistol, but the report had come from under the wooden floor. This was quite unexpected.

Pak Gi Nam pulled the trigger at the cop in spectacles. A volley of shots burst out.

Still holding the guns in his arms, Dong Chon slowly started to slide sideways and then collapsed, his shoulder striking the telephone.

Gunshots continued to ring out from under the wooden floor.

"Get out through the back!"

Li Chol Gun's eyes flashed with fire. He raised Dong Chon to his feet but he collapsed in a heap. His chest was soaked with blood.

Li Chol Gun hitched Dong Chon on to his back and hurried out of the front door.

"My gun!" Dong Chon who was still conscious asked for the gun he had just obtained. Li Chol Gun left Dong Chon to the care of Comrade Chi and went in to collect the guns lying on the floor.

Pak Gi Nam fired his pistol three times at the enemy hidden under the wooden floor before dashing out of the window and scaling the wall.

The street was astir with alarm. A siren wailed from the battery watch tower.

Warning whistles sounded in side streets, and the battery of the military police detachment opened fire. Dogs barked and there was a noisy clatter of hoofs, too.

Li Chol Gun and Comrade Chi rushed through the paddy fields, taking turns to carry Dong Chon on their backs. The other comrades ran, carrying fourteen rifles between them. After the paddy fields came the stream. Li Chol Gun waded through the water with Dong Chon in his arms.

Dong Chon did not utter one groan while being carried on his comrades' backs.

When they came to a grassy spot on a mountain ridge about five *ri* off, they laid down the wounded man to give him first aid. They tore off their shirts to make a heavy bandage for the wound, but the blood still oozed out.

Pak Gi Nam and his party arrived. They said the enemy would soon be after them, so they all moved on, carrying Dong Chon.

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The stretcher bearing Dong Chon was carried northwards across mountain crests and valleys. Now and then, the wounded man would lose consciousness, though he tried his utmost to keep his senses. Whenever he opened his eyes the starry sky seemed to dance and a crescent moon swam to and fro among the branches of the pine trees. As he gasped his shoulders heaved violently, but of this he was unaware.

Trying to adapt himself to every movement of the stretcher

bearers, Li Dong Chon was in a peaceful mood, fancying that soon he would arrive at Yungping where he would get all the medicine and treatment he needed. This was all he thought about.

Dong Chon's silence worried Li Chol Gun still more. He seemed to have lost his soul. Carrying the stretcher, he observed the wounded man closely. Whenever Dong Chon became completely quiet Li Chol Gun would shake his feet to keep him awake.

"Dong Chon! Dong Chon!"

"What's the matter? I'm all right...."

"Wake up!"

"Don't worry about me. I want water...."

"You must wait a bit. You'll get some soon."

There would be another silence.

Sweat poured down Li Chol Gun's face; he imagined this young man had been wounded because of some blunder of his. He walked with great difficulty. Now and again he stumbled over rocks or tree stumps. Even when there was nothing in the way, his legs could hardly carry him, he was feeling so weak about the knees.

Pak Gi Nam carried the front end of the stretcher and hurried through thickets. His trousers were torn leaving his knees bare, and the soles of his feet were streaked with blood where he had badly grazed his toes against sharp stones.

Comrade Chi was also silent. He was so quiet that if he had not taken over the stretcher from his comrades now and again, his presence would have remained unnoticed. Gripped by a premonition that Dong Chon lying on the stretcher was already dead, he shed tears continually as he walked along supporting the stretcher with Comrade Yang on the other side. They had both called on Li Chol Gun and joined the guerrillas at the same time.

Li Dong Chon had lived in Hoeryong before. His father, who had tilled a patch of land cleared away beside the Tuman-gang River, had been arrested and beaten by the forest rangers, and had died a week after his release. Two years ago he had come to Yungping with his mother and two brothers. He had worked as servant and farmed himself to eke out a living. He was clever, and had learned how to write and had joined the Young Communist League earlier than anyone else. He was

tenacious and had never been content to leave anything half finished.

"Dong Chon!"

No answer. Scared, Li Chol Gun stretched out his hand and touched Dong Chon's ankle.

"Dong Chon!"

"Yes?"

"Just a little more patience and we'll be there."

Two more passes and a valley and they would be in the Yungping area.

Day broke and the treetops were clearly silhouetted against the sky. Mist was floating down into the valley.

All of them walked as quickly as they could, silently, their lips firmly set.

"Comrade Chol Gun!"

Li Chol Gun gave a start, as if electrified. He thought Dong Chon had called to him, and looked down. But the wounded man lay silent. Presently he heard the call again "Comrade Chol Gun!"

This time he saw Dong Chon's lips move.

"Let's stop for a while."

Li Chol Gun and his comrades put the stretcher on the grass. Then he knelt down to peer at Dong Chon's face.

"What's the matter, Dong Chon?"

"Comrade Chol Gun? You've got the gun I took?"

He held out his hand, keeping his eyes closed.

"Yes, I have. I've got the gun you won."

Comrade Chi took the rifle off his shoulder and handed it to Li Chol Gun. He held it crossways and placed it on Dong Chon's chest.

"Here you are. Comrade Dong Chon. Here you are."

He took Dong Chon's hand and set it on the rifle butt. Dong Chon opened his slightly swollen eyes and looked up. Grasping the gun, Dong Chon looked at it for a while with shining eyes and suddenly lifted it in the air.

Everybody watched breathless.

Dong Chon's eyes lost focus and stared round vacantly. Then, at last they alighted on the upright gun barrel. His lips quivered and his eyes sparkled.

"Oh, what a pity! I wanted to carry this gun and to salute General Kum Song. I wanted to destroy all the Japs and see our

country restored to independence... but I couldn't even fire a shot and...."

He barely managed to draw a breath and added gently:

"Comrade Li Chol Gun! You said you had met General Kum Song, didn't you? I haven't met him yet. But I've tried to live up to his expectations. When you meet him, please give him my regards. The General may not know my name. But that's all right. Please give him my regards. Please. Oh, what a pity! I did so want to see him, carrying this gun on my shoulder...."

The gun fell across his chest and he closed his eyes. Then his body gave one shudder and he was still as if asleep.

"Dong Chon!" Li Chol Gun cried out, followed by Pak Gi Nam. But Dong Chon did not reply.

Comrades Chi and Yang called him, too, but there was no answer.

Dong Chon had passed away.

Li Chol Gun took him in his arms, trembling.

"Dong Chon!"

"Dong Chon!"

Hugging his body, now still warm, the four young men wept bitterly. Their wailing echoed through the valley in the early dawn.

Li Chol Gun touched Dong Chon's face and rubbed his cheek wet with tears against the dead man's. He felt Dong Chon would open his eyes at any moment and put out his hand for his gun.

"Dong Chon, my boy! Are you really dead? Dead? Why have you died?"

He shook his body, raised his hands and opened his eyes, but his comrade was as silent as the grave. His drawn, expressionless face looked blankly up at the sky now turning a faint blue.

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Buried in sad thoughts the two men climbed slowly up towards the mountain ridge.

Fierce waves of life came surging upon the valleside.

Not long ago, Li Chol Gun and Pak Gi Nam had sat facing

each other in the cave and drawn a big circle on a rough map, indicating a liberated area. And now in this area of Wangching unexpected things were happening one after another.

The stretcher carrying Dong Chon's dead body had passed right through the village where people from adjacent areas poured in every day to settle. Day and night the revolutionary masses of people flocked to the guerrilla base by road, across the mountains, through the forest. The number of the arrivals steadily increased. On the other hand, there were those who fled. Mostly they were the families of hostile landlords, the agents of the Japanese imperialists, or the police, or vicious officials who served in the enemy's administrative bodies.

"This is one of the grim sides of life. But it is a natural process. There is no birth without pains. Comrade Chol Gun, I have been thinking: The revolution asks all of us Koreans, 'Take up your respective positions!' Each one of us is flowing rapidly into the stream of revolution as demanded by his class, his position. A lot of people are coming to the fold of the revolution while a tiny handful go over to the counterrevolution. We might well call this the 'crossroads of life'. What do you think, Comrade Chol Gun?"

Taciturn as ever, Li Chol Gun nodded, indicating neither yes nor no. He was in no mood to talk. They were in the mountain looking for a suitable place for Dong Chon's grave, when they caught sight of the village below and started talking.

Li Chol Gun's aesthetic feelings were no less rich and diverse than Pak Gi Nam's but he had seldom expressed them.

Cautiously looking ahead or down at the ground, Li Chol Gun felt keenly the great changes in this part of the world. For where they stood, the revolution and the counterrevolution were in direct confrontation.

Two diametrically opposite forces now faced each other, and two ideologies waged a bloody battle. That decisive battle with no armistice or peace treaty which the Comrade Commander had spoken of had begun, the grim scene had started to unfold before their eyes. "My gun! I couldn't even fire a shot and...." His ears were still ringing with Dong Chon's last words, which reflected one grim aspect of their fight.

Looking at Chol Gun's set face, Pak Gi Nam smiled.

"Lately, I have been thinking I'd better learn what a Com-mune or a Soviet means." Pak Gi Nam blurted out his unusual idea.

“A Soviet?”

“Yes. After the old institutions have been overthrown, we must have something to replace them.”

Stunned, Li Chol Gun squinted at Pak Gi Nam. Then he plucked a handful of bush clover flowers and, throwing them in front of him, kept on walking.

Pak Gi Nam was very anxious to explain the need in detail. The view he had expressed just now, simple as it seemed, was deeply rooted. At every opportunity he had criticized the Korean communist movement of the early twenties, with deep hatred. This was because it had claimed that since the Korean revolution was a bourgeois revolution, the bourgeoisie had to assume hegemony, and had turned its ranks into disorderly mobs, by opening its doors wide to all sorts of would-be Marxists, petit-bourgeois intellectuals carried away by the revolutionary fervour of the times. To this he was determinedly opposed. And now he was fascinated by the idea of the Soviet as a form of government, and also was terribly afraid that these cursed intellectuals might once again creep into the revolutionary ranks.

“Socialism—the Soviet,” he uttered to himself, but he dared not explain it here in this place. Meanwhile, Li Chol Gun stopped to look at his toes. A feeling of sadness suddenly came over him. His conscience again smote him for he thought he was to blame for Li Dong Chon’s death. Already at Liangkiang Comrade Kum Song had given him an excellent demonstration on how to organize a combat operation, but he had based himself on inaccurate reconnaissance information and taken rash action that had led to the death of a dear comrade. Now it was irretrievable, a thing of the past.

Like a lost soul, Li Chol Gun stood gazing vacantly down at the village before resuming his staggering walk.

He had changed a lot since Li Dong Chon’s death. He had become more withdrawn and glum, always walking with his head down, looking at his toes. He was gripped by a firm conviction that he had to be infallible in his analysis and planning and that this had to be supported by the meticulous work of organization.

Pak Gi Nam, on the other hand, had been affected in another way. He had grieved more than anybody over Li Dong Chon’s death, but he had become tougher and less attentive. He used words like “dictatorship” or “blow” more often, was unnecessarily fussy, expending excessive energies.

Pak Gi Nam wanted to expound his views to Li Chol Gun on the problem raised in their conversation, but dropped the idea and changed the subject.

"When are we going to hold the mass rally?"

"Let's have it in a few days' time."

"How about retaliating against them all at once instead of dealing with them piecemeal?"

"Retaliate?"

"We have to show that we Communists are as vengeful as any others."

"To whom?"

"To history."

"You must calm down, Comrade Pak."

On returning to company headquarters Pak Gi Nam went inside while Li Chol Gun set out to make his round of the sentry posts.

Li Chol Gun's admonition made Pak Gi Nam a trifle gloomy. For though he had not said as much in words, Pak had felt certain that he was criticizing him for being 'too leftish'. Pak Gi Nam was nervous he knew not why, although Li Chol Gun never actually said anything definite.

At forenoon strangers called at headquarters. One of them was a youth of around 30 in silver-rimmed spectacles, wearing a single-breasted white serge suit, the other was a girl with short hair who looked fifteen or sixteen.

They said they had come to see Li Chol Gun, but as he had gone to Hwangga Village, they were met by Pak Gi Nam.

The youth with silver-rimmed spectacles was Paek Gwang Myong, a private school teacher at Chang Village some 50 *ri* away, and the girl Kim Jong Ok was from Big Valley.

Seated across from Pak Gi Nam, the visitors looked dazed for a while as they took in the red banner and the map of Korea on the walls.

"I've a problem that needs to be solved in relation to our Children's Corps activity."

"Go ahead and tell me about it," Pak Gi Nam said calmly. Judging by the expression on her face he expected her to come up with some trouble.

"I'm looking after fourteen orphans whose parents were killed during the 'punitive operation' against Big Valley. I want to send them to school. Mr. Paek Gwang Myong here is

a teacher at the private school at Chang Village, so I've brought him here."

"So what do you want?"

He smiled as he remembered Li Chol Gun's wish to use this house as a school.

"I want you to..."

She licked her lips to moisten them and resumed shyly:

"Mr. Paek says he has 39 children at his school. He thinks there will be a 'punitive operation' there, too, so he wants to move his school into this place and..."

"So you want to bring Mr. Paek here and join your group with his?"

"Yes."

"Yes? The problem isn't as simple as it looks."

Stroking his thin whiskers with his hand, he narrowed his eyes and made a wily face.

"Well, I can see your point. But how about you, Mr. Paek, why do you want to come here?"

Pushing his silver-rimmed spectacles higher up on his nose, Paek Gwang Myong spoke in a low voice.

"Yes, I want to come, but for no special reason."

He then made a brief explanation.

It was over a month now since Jong Ok had visited Paek Gwang Myong at his school. After the "punitive operation" against Big Valley, her brother Chojjae, living with his aunt at Chang Village, had told her that a school had opened there. Since Jong Ok wanted the children to be educated she and her brother went to see the teacher. Jong Ok told him that she had fourteen children and asked him if he could take them in along with his present pupils. He readily agreed. Then they had started to look for a proper place for schooling and secure other necessary facilities.

"I had something to do in this village today, and I met her here."

Slim-necked and square-shouldered, Paek Gwang Myong tried to read Pak's mood with his melancholy eyes. Pak Gi Nam rose and walked round the room, his hands folded behind his back.

"Which school did you graduate from, Mr. Paek?"

"Well, er...I studied at the faculty of literature of..."

"Oh, you are a man of literature, eh? An intellectual is making a revolution? I see. What do your parents do?"

"Well...."

The teacher was embarrassed. His face coloured and his lips quivered slightly.

"My father has some land and an orchard. He is now running a small factory. He is sick in bed these days."

"Is that so?"

At that moment Pak Gi Nam was struck with the class definition that this man was a bourgeois intellectual. Feeling his heart sink suddenly, he continued with his inquiry.

"But why do you want to come over to our side in this life-and-death struggle?"

He laid strong emphasis on the words "our side".

"It is based on my belief," said Paek Gwang Myong, sharply raising his head and looking very sure of himself.

"Have you ever thought of what the revolution would bring you?"

"Yes! I think the revolution may demand my life. However, if I can help to free our homeland which is on the brink of ruin, then I'll readily...."

"Ah, is that so?"

Pak Gi Nam took a step towards the red banner and raised his hand. He had rarely done this. It meant that he had reached a decision.

Seeing this, Jong Ok broke into a smile, brushing up a wisp of hair covering her forehead. Paek Gwang Myong's thick glasses flashed. But they did not know that Pak Gi Nam's decision would be contrary to what they had been expecting.

"Comrade Jong Ok. How about settling the matter this way? The most pressing task for us is to form a guerrilla force and secure a definite area. We are shedding our blood for this. The education of the children is an important question but...."

Jong Ok's eyes immediately brimmed with tears. She dropped her head, bit her lips and began twisting her jacket strings.

"But how do matters stand with us now? We...er...we have to go back up the mountain and bury a guerrilla's body. Do you understand? If you understand this one thing, then everything else will be clear to you. I thank you for coming to see us but...."

What Pak Gi Nam had wanted to say was not that the situation was tense or that Jong Ok's proposal was unreasonable. To him the issue was that it was impossible to draw a bourgeois intellectual into the sacred fold of the revolution.

Again he remembered the bloody lessons of the early twenties, which were deeply engraved on his heart. However, instead of being curt with the teacher and rejecting his request downright, he thought he had better put him off quietly without hurting his feelings.

"This is the point, Mr. Paek. Frankly speaking, the question is not whether or not you are going to educate our children; you are a bourgeois intellectual, as you said, and the point is how to deal with a bourgeois intellectual. So you have to give us time to think it over."

"Oh, I see."

"We Marxists have never hesitated to declare our views; we always express our political principles unambiguously. That's why our position is clear and our action resolute. Our position is thoroughly proletarian, from beginning to end. As I've just told our local representative on the mountain ridge, the revolution is now demanding of us that we take up our respective positions. That is why every day several families move into this valley, while some move out. It is no simple house-moving; not just a movement of loaded ox carts in and out. It is a great upheaval. Today a big unmerciful screen has been erected in Korea, and is sieving everyone. Who will pass through the screen and who will stay? If those who should pass through it remained behind or those who should remain passed through it, then it would be a grave deviation; it would be abnormal and unreasonable."

Paek Gwang Myong, choked by the smoke of his cigarette, coughed. He turned his tear-filled eyes to the clouds of smoke in the air. He remembered the night when he had met the General at Hsiaoshaho, and was stunned at what his host had just said. His line was entirely different from the General's. Paek Gwang Myong's surging emotion demanded that he shatter his arrogant opponent with the great, irrefutable truth the General had expounded. But reason held him in check, urging him to be careful. He didn't know what to do with himself. His face turned white and his whole body trembled like a leaf. But his faith was not broken.

Again adjusting his spectacles on his slippery nose, Paek Gwang Myong spoke with a determined note in his voice to Pak Gi Nam whose face had reddened.

"May I ask you a question? Where is General Kum Song now?"

"Where is the General?"

"Yes!"

Pak Gi Nam's flushed face turned purple. He had a desire to call out, "You are a spy!" and to pull out his pistol. However, he controlled himself with the utmost patience. Pak Gi Nam might be excitable, but control himself he could. He stalked up and down the room, breathing heavily. Then he decided to hit back at his questioner by using a sharp metaphor.

"I'm very sorry but I must say good-bye now, Mr. Paek. I have little time to talk to you today because I have some urgent business to attend to. If you are not busy, stay here for a few more days. Then you will see a people's trial of counter-revolutionaries. We are going to eliminate the counterrevolution."

"Thank you. I'll be seeing you then. Please send for me when you have time to spare."

Brushing back the hair which had fallen around his ear, Paek Gwang Myong stepped back a few paces and went out. Pak Gi Nam followed the guest out into the yard to show that he was not impolite. In the yard Jong Ok stood in front of Pak Gi Nam and said in a firm and strong voice.

"I'll see to it that our children are educated come what may."

"Good. I understand your sincerity."

With her last words, Jong Ok had expressed her objection to all that Pak Gi Nam had said so far, but he failed to understand her.

"Well, go. You'll know that revolution is not as simple and easy as you think."

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A few days had passed since the funeral of Li Dong Chon. Towards evening Li Chol Gun was told that the people had started gathering, and he and Pak Gi Nam went up behind the village. They walked side by side, chatting amicably.

There were a lot of people gathered on a grassy slope behind the village, where a few chestnut trees stood.

Hyon Gi Taek, head of the Anti-Imperialist League, had spread straw mats on the slope and seated people as they came.

And Gob Dan, head of the Women's Association, her bun fixed in place with an ornamental hairpin, ushered in the women who came up with flushed faces.

"Aunt Gob Dan, I didn't expect to see so many revolutionary people."

Hyon Gi Taek turned his greying, short-clipped head to look over the meeting place. There were at least three hundred people.

"It's like streams forming a huge river."

He smiled in satisfaction at Gob Dan's appropriate comment, curling his upper lip topped with a black moustache, and looked at her back.

"Sit where you like. There should be no feudal discrimination between the sexes here at this meeting place." Gob Dan told a group of women huddling together at a corner and led them to another place so that they sat in rows with the men.

Many young girls and old people, bent with age, came up, too, leaning on their walking sticks.

Li Chol Gun and Pak Gi Nam stood at a corner to receive the old folk.

Old Kang, the elder of the village, arrived. His white beard covered the upper half of his chest. He was 81 but still in good health. His head shook slightly but he climbed the slope without difficulty.

"I've come to see what communism is like."

As Li Chol Gun made a deep bow, the old man grinned, narrowing his moist, red-rimmed eyes.

"We are going to put a traitor on trial, Grandpa."

"Yes, so I was told by my son. Who is the traitor?"

"You know Choe Dok Man? His son is a sabre-rattling Japanese dog at Ryongdure Street."

"I see. Such a fellow must be exterminated together with his children and grandchildren. He must be torn to shreds. He burned a field of ripe wheat, didn't he? The loathsome creature! He is the one who had the red restraint paper pasted on my door, because I couldn't pay off my debt to him. I told him I would see him ruined before I died. Well, young man, do you call this a revolution?"

"Yes, you are right. This is a revolution."

"My son is scurrying about day in and day out, shouting: 'revolution, revolution'. So I thought you would do what the Righteous Volunteers used to do."

"We fight the Japanese, arms in hand."

"That's fine, that's fine. You must destroy all those dwarfs from the island country. Have you heard about 'Let's Wail Bitterly and Loudly'? At that time, I also wailed bitterly and loudly, striking the ground with clenched fists, though now I've got one foot in the grave...."

Li Chol Gun took Old Kang into the midst of the audience.

Now Gob Dan ushered in Dong Chon's mother. She was dressed in white and wore a white hood. She was 45 but looked much older. Her eyelids were inflamed with weeping for her dead son. Gob Dan guided her to the front row where the straw mats had been spread. Beside her sat down Dong Chon's younger brother, Gwang Chon. He was only fourteen, but he had grown up a lot in these last few days. The day before he had met Li Chol Gun and insisted on joining the guerrillas to avenge his brother's death.

Li Chol Gun only heard that Dong Chon's mother had arrived when she was already seated, and he went to her and bowed. She merely listened to Li Chol Gun's words of comfort and hid her sadness. She made quiet replies when she thought she should and, now and then, brushed back a few stray hairs behind her ear.

When the meeting was about to begin, two Red Guardsmen brought in Choe Dok Man and his bespectacled son, Choe Il Ho, and seated them in front of the audience.

Choe Dok Man was fifty-three, well built and of medium height. He had been kept in custody for a few days in the store-room of his own house. His eyes were sunken and his grey serge trousers dusty. His chin, always clean-shaven, was black with stubble and the thin hair on his almost bald head was dishevelled. He kept mumbling; it was uncertain whether he was eating or cursing.

Choe Il Ho, Choe Dok Man's second son, owned a big linen shop at Namyang. His brother had sent him to this area to help his father to escape. All plans were made by his brother and he had executed them. His brother had given him the pistol with which he had fired at Dong Chon on the day he went.

Choe Dok Man glared at the audience in disgust and turned away.

"Sit and face the people!" One of the Red Guardsmen pushed him in the back with his rifle butt.

He hesitated and lazily turned round.

"Don't be so high and mighty. Kneel!"

This time the Red Guardsman kicked him in the shin.

As Choe Dok Man's bloodshot eyes looked offended, the young man gave him another kick to teach him.

"Don't you know the world has changed?"

The meeting began. Pak Gi Nam declared that Choe Dok Man had been put on trial by the people. Then Li Chol Gun made a brief report on Choe Dok Man's crimes.

Choe Dok Man was from Hamhung. He had come here ten years ago to make money. He bought small tracts of land and rented them out, and by bribing the police, had deprived the peasants of their land. He became more and more insolent, and with his policeman son behind him, took harsh and malicious actions against people, and also informed on the revolutionary organizations here. With scores of *chongbo* of land, he cruelly exploited his tenants. Harboring bitter hatred for the mounting revolutionary spirit of the population, he had set fire to a field of ripe wheat with paraffin while fleeing with his son. He had thrown a log into a nearby well so that the villagers could not dip the ladle. Taking advantage of the confusion caused by the fire, he had tried to escape.

When his crimes had been enumerated, Li Chol Gun put them forward for discussion by the audience. Then, as scheduled, he proclaimed that the guerrilla force of the Wangching area had started its activity, that the guerrillas had this area under control and would wipe out the reactionary order established by Japanese imperialism and that from now on everything would be decided on by the people. Therefore, he added, the people would try Choe Dok Man today.

Pak Gi Nam and Li Chol Gun, as well as Hyon Gi Taek, Pak Chun Gyong and Gob Dan, heads of mass organizations, took their places on the tribune set up on a hillock.

For about ten minutes the audience was silent; then a young man raised his hand and stood up. Pak Gi Nam rose and asked his name. He was Han Song Nam from Hwangga Village. This youth, husky and large-eyed, looked 24 or 25. He introduced himself as Choe Dok Man's servant and said in a trembling voice.

"I'm also a bad man. You must put me on trial, too. When

those men were trying to escape, I led the oxcart loaded with their things. At first it looked very suspicious, so I said I couldn't go. Then that son in glasses struck me in the face and told me I must go. I said I couldn't. Then he threatened me at the point of his gun. So I committed an unpardonable crime.

"I've served him since I was twelve. He has given me so many hard times. He is not a man, he is a leech that sucks your blood. He racked his brains for ways to bleed us peasants white. In order to grab our land, he would inform the police that such-and-such a man was a Communist, and get them to arrest him. Then he got the land at a giveaway price. He did this to Li Sang Yong, Hyon Guk In and the Pear Tree House. The former head of the Anti-Imperialist League, Brother Kang Han Song was arrested and beaten and died five days after he was set free. That, too, was because of this man. He had been looking at Sol Mae but she did not give in. So he told her father to pay his debts. Still she wouldn't give in to him. So he got the police to arrest her father and then he took her away. Sol Mae escaped that night and drowned herself in the well and her mother hung herself from the cross beam in the kitchen. And...."

There was a commotion among the people. Some of them rose, shaking their clenched fists. Someone suggested that they cut the cackle and stone him to death right away; others said he should be tied hand and foot and thrown into the well where Sol Mae had drowned herself. Still others suggested that his limbs be chopped off or that he be hanged.

It seemed hardly possible to restore order. While letting them express their anger freely, Li Chol Gun now guided the meeting in such a way as to bring the people to class awareness and increase their anti-Japanese feelings.

At the height of the heated debate Old Kang pushed his way forward through the crowd. His head shook and the end of his long beard quivered on his chest. On approaching Choe Dok Man he lifted his foot and kicked off a straw sandal. Then he picked it up and went up to the accused. Shaking, he raised his straw sandal above his head and then slowly brought it down on Choe Dok Man's whitish face. He missed the second blow but the third caught the criminal as he turned his head, so that the sandal hit his nose. With a spanking sound Choe Dok Man lifted his head up only to drop it between his knees.

"Does it hurt you, scoundrel? It doesn't hurt you much. Well, I must hit you more. I must give vent to my wrath."

Pursing his lips, Old Kang grabbed Choe's curly hair, pulling him this way and that until he fell to the ground. The old man stamped on his thick neck with his dirt-covered foot. He did this for a good while until he plumped to the ground exhausted. Still seated there, he started to shout to the people: "This bastard had my son arrested and killed. He is as wicked as the Japs. Korea has been ruined because of fellows like him. His kind became Jap agents and sold our country. The Japs are wicked all right but this is a blackguard with a Korean face. Beat him to death! The bastard!"

As time passed, the spirit of the masses became more and more inflamed. The speakers condemned not only Choe Dok Man but also denounced all manner of oppression, insult and maltreatment.

"How times have changed!" The old men smoking their pipes exclaimed as they saw the reality unfolding before their eyes.

"They say only the revolution brings us liberty and rights, and this is what they mean."

Young people were excited, clenching their fists.

"We would rather fight and die than live oppressed."

"Long live the revolution!"

For a few hours they made speeches, condemned and gave vent to their rage. The conclusion was very simple. Li Chol Gun rose and made a brief speech.

"Villagers, we the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army will fight until we have destroyed the Jap imperialists in our country to the last man. Today we have put Choe Dok Man, their hireling, and his son on trial, but in the future we'll try Japanese imperialism itself. Our wise leader General Kum Song formed the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army with young people and sent us here. Now, look!"

Li Chol Gun stepped aside, stretched out his hand to point to the guerrillas standing in line. The Yungping Company formed by Li Chol Gun in the Wangching area under Comrade Kum Song's tutelage, stood in double file. They were in khaki uniforms and caps, all armed with shining rifles. Li Chol Gun stepped towards the company, stood at attention on the right and commanded, "Present arms!" All of them held up their guns. This was a formal declaration of the company's formation and, at the same time, a manifestation of their resolve to fight for the people to the last.

There was a storm of applause.

He went back to his place to continue his speech.

"Villagers, as you saw today, only when we fight on the side of revolution can we win freedom and claim our rights. Let us all aid the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army and join in the battle to win back our country. General Kum Song taught us: Those who have money should give their money, those who have knowledge their knowledge, and those who have nothing their physical strength, and take part as one man in the battle to liberate our country. Let us unite as one man and take the path of revolution, as the General said.

"We are determined to shed our blood. As you know, Comrade Li Dong Chon gave his life to get a rifle. We'll use the guns gotten by the sacrifice of our comrades' lives to fight to the last drop of blood. You young ardent men and women, come and join us in the guerrilla army! Take guns from the Japanese and come to us.

"Villagers, help the guerrilla army in every way you can. Because we have set up our base here, the Jap imperialists will send out still filthier 'punitive missions' than before. You must link up with the guerrillas and fight to defend this base."

The audience shouted for joy.

Li Chol Gun had forgotten the outline of his speech and was speaking off-the-cuff. He was not very eloquent, his sentences were not well turned, he repeated himself and stuttered. But his words were spoken from his heart. Taking his cap in his hand and wiping the sweat from his brow with his hand, he spoke at the top of his voice.

Pak Gi Nam presided over the last phase of the people's trial. Having run his flashing eyes over the audience, he threw out his chest and addressed them in a firm voice.

"Those who agree to punish, in the name of the people, Choe Dok Man, the running dog of Japanese imperialism and vicious landlord, and his son, Choe Il Ho, raise their hands!"

All hands went up.

"Good. Put your hands down. Are there any objections?"

There was not one objection.

"Then it is decided to put them to death according to your will."

Again there was a stir in the audience. At this moment Dong Chon's mother rose to her feet. Pak Gi Nam called to the people to be quiet. There was dead silence.

She brushed back a thin lock of hair from her ear and dropped her head in meditation for a while before she raised her face. Pressing both her hands against her breast she spoke in a gentle voice.

"Good neighbours, let me say a few words. My nineteen-year-old son Dong Chon was shot by the Japs and is buried on the hillside there. His father, too, died after the Japanese had beaten him up for working on the burnt patches of land. Dong Chon served that fellow, Choe Dok Man. You know it well. Snow or wind, he was in unlined hemp clothes and went to the mountains to fetch firewood, shivering with the cold. And yet, I would tell him: 'Son, work hard always so that you may not annoy the master. Once you are unfaithful to him, the four of us will starve to death.' But now I realize that the world is different from what I saw before. The day before he died, Dong Chon came home, carrying his sharpened spear. At that moment that old fox appeared at my house. Dong Chon said that in order to see a good world such fellows must be killed. Guerilla officer, I have a wish. Let us ourselves take vengeance on the enemy, by the rights General Kum Song has brought us. Let my second son, Gwang Chon, deal with that swine."

She was going to speak further, but she felt choked with emotion and so sat down.

Her words gripped the people's hearts so completely that while she was speaking, only the sound of heavy breathing could be heard. Then loud shouts of "hear, hear" burst out.

"Let's meet her wish," said Hak Chun, the smith, in a husky voice, raising his clenched fist.

All the people shouted in agreement. Pak Gi Nam said that the proposal had been accepted. Dong Chon's mother pushed her son Gwang Chon in the back. The sleeves of his hemp jacket were so ridiculously short that they hardly covered his forearms. He walked up to Li Chol Gun in a springy step, with his brother's spear in his hand.

The Red Guardsmen raised Choe Dok Man to his feet.

Li Chol Gun exchanged Gwang Chon's spear for a rifle. It was the very gun Dong Chon had taken for himself but had never had a chance to fire.

A few minutes after they disappeared beyond the hillock, two shots rang out.

So far, the troops had marched over a thousand *ri*. From Chonsangdegi they had followed the Amnok-gang River through Okbawi-gol, stopping off in many places. They had passed through Yingan and Laoling and crossed Mt. Pawi-san.

Tunghua was not far off. In a day or two they should be in the area controlled by Chu Ho Rim's Independence Army.

As instructed by Comrade Kum Song, Han Hung Su examined the unit's activities so far and explained to the men what had to be done in the second phase of the march.

They needed to expand their zone of activity around Tunghua as far as Liuho, Hailung, Huinan and even down to Hsingching, Chingyuan and Huanjen. Once Mengchiang and Huatien and other places up in the north were included, the zone would cover the entire breadth of the Tuman-gang River area. This zone was much influenced by Independence Army units and the Chinese Anti-Japanese National Salvation Army, too, had sizable forces there. So, at Small Plot we had already made it an important goal to form a united front with them. In forming the national united front of various anti-Japanese strata, based on a worker-peasant alliance, the linkup with the Independence Army was of much significance, while at the same time it served to reinforce the guerrilla army. It was also urgent to create a united front with foreign forces against Japan to defeat her aggressive militarist policy.

Way back at Kirin, Comrade Kum Song had developed the views of the classics on the necessity of forming an international alliance of the proletariat against capital, and repeatedly and emphatically advocated the anti-imperialist united front of all oppressed colonial peoples, as virtually urgent for the international working-class and communist movements.

Han Hung Su spent many hours explaining these political problems and also went into considerable detail as to what the guerrillas must bear in mind when making contact with the Independence Army and the Chinese Anti-Japanese National

Salvation Army. He specially emphasized that while at Kirin, Chialun and Wuchiatzu, Comrade Kum Song had sent out many members of the Young Communist League to spread the seeds of revolution in Liuho, Hsingching, Hailung and other places. When there had been a danger of sectarian elements and national reformists splitting the youth movement, Comrade Kum Song had gone himself to Hsingching, had risked his life to show the young Communists the right road. So, Han Hung Su told the guerrillas repeatedly that their political work must be more vigorous than ever, taking the rather different characteristics of this area into account.

The troops must, first of all, go to Tunghua to make contact with Chu Ho Rim's Independence Army troops.

Before they entered Tunghua, the guerrillas rested for a whole day in a charming valley called Sudong. They made camp beside a stream that flowed down to the Amnok-gang River. The forest was animated and in a festive mood. The guerrillas chatted in small groups in the cool shade of the trees. Some did their washing or bathed at the crystal-clear stream.

Pak Hung Dok set up a barber shop in the shade of a tree. For a chair he stood a log on a bare patch of ground. He always seemed to get excited when he did this sort of thing. He seated Choe Chil Song on the log chair, tied a piece of cloth round his neck and set to work on his hair with the rattling clippers.

"You're pulling, not cutting," Choe Chil Song complained, screwing up his face and stretching his neck at every move of the clippers.

"Keep still, man. Stop worrying about my cutting or pulling. You'll look like a bridegroom when I've finished. I may not look like a barber, but I can tell you this much, all the boys in my village used to come to me for a haircut before their wedding."

He was good at it too, and had the gift of the gab. He snipped away with scissors and comb, at the same time calling out to passing guerrillas, finding fault with their appearance.

"Comrade Pak, wash your clothes well. Guerrillas mustn't look shabby. If you can't fix that tear on your back, bring it to me. I'm better than any woman with a needle."

And to another comrade he called out.

"Mend your shoes. I've got a bit of string in my knapsack. And an awl I made out of an umbrella frame...."

The quartermaster kept on this way at all of them, but no one minded. His comments were fair enough, and anyway they

always needed Pak Hung Dok's help to put things right. But all this meddling was interfering with his barber's job, which he seemed to have realized. Beads of sweat came up on his nose. After working for a while, he tossed his head, and took two steps back to look. The right side looked a little short, so he cut a bit more off the left. But now that looked still shorter. His sleeves rolled up, Pak Hung Dok sniffed and got busy again.

"It's a long time since I used a pair of scissors and it doesn't seem to be coming out too well," he said, cunningly covering up his mistake of having cut one side too short.

"Hurry up and finish it, will you? I'm getting very hot."

"No, I can't. It has to be perfect. Everything has a beginning as well as an end. If I don't do a good job, those fellows in the Independence Army will laugh at us, won't they?"

"We are going to form a united front with them, aren't we?"

"Yes. And we'll have to exert our influence upon them. In a word, we must show them how excellent is the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army formed and commanded by Comrade Kum Song. Then we'll join up with them and hit out at Japanese imperialism together."

"I'm worried because I'm so ignorant..."

"Don't you worry. Both you and I used to be bondslaves. We'll tell them that the guerrilla army is made up of the people who were oppressed and exploited more than anybody else and that we are ready to fight the Japanese until we win victory. That should be enough. Didn't the Comrade Commander tell us that the Independence Army soldiers are former peasants like us? And he said that we can influence them easily."

They talked a lot about Chu Ho Rim's troops whom they would meet soon.

"Have you finished?"

"Just a minute. I've still got to shave you, then you'll be ready. We must show the Independence Army soldiers that we are not only disciplined but also all neat and tidy and cultured."

There wasn't much he could say, so Choe Chil Song waited anxiously for Pak Hung Dok to finish, stretching his neck. Sweat broke out on his forehead and on Pak Hung Dok's—his face was positively glistening with it.

Meanwhile, on a rock on the waterside Se Gol was working, bending over and breathing hard. Stripped to the waist,

he was beating the roots of a wild walnut tree with a big stone. At every blow the roots were torn and crushed, and the reddish sticky liquid made a little pool on the rock.

As soon as he had heard that they were making camp, he had looked at the stream and then gone hunting for wild walnut trees in the thicket. As he dug up the roots, he boasted that he would catch a lot of bull trout in the evening, fish as big as his forearm. But no one would join him in this enterprise. All the better for him, he thought; he would surprise them, saying "Look what I've got."

Se Gol wiped the sweat under his chin and kept beating at the roots with the stone.

He was a good mixer, a man who would be on intimate terms with almost anyone after exchanging a few words. He had made friends with everyone a few days after joining the guerrilla army. As he had worked since early childhood, he had a vast stock of information; he was coarse but clever and bold. And he was marvellously deft. He wanted to do something fantastic that would make the whole unit look at him, the newcomer, in amazement.

"What are you doing there?"

He jumped to his feet. He heard the Comrade Commander's voice behind him.

"Er... I'm going to catch fish," he replied briskly, lifting his perspiring face. He slipped on his clothes and stood at attention.

"To catch fish? Hum, those are wild walnut roots. But you can't do it alone, can you?"

"I can. I'll go upstream and stem the water. That's all. All of us will catch fish together."

Comrade Kum Song smiled and said that it was pleasant to hear that. He volunteered to help him. Hanging his tunic on a bough, he beat the roots with the back of an axe, seated across from Se Gol. Se Gol was now happily excited. He thought that his job was far more important and worthwhile than what the other groups were doing; Chin Bong Nam had bragged to him that he would go and catch a bear with Han Hung Su, and Yong Suk and her friends had gone to find a wild *insam*. Sensitive and yet rather restless, Se Gol busied himself, sometimes, mixing things up, putting the roots into a rough basket, or chopping big ones with an axe. As a thought flashed through his mind, he stretched himself, put his heels together and said:

"Comrade Commander!"

"What?"

"May I make a request?"

"Why have you become so serious all of a sudden?"

"I'd like to make a small request."

"What is it?"

Whenever he became serious, his face would look frozen as if he had icicles hanging from his chin. Comrade Kum Song looked up and smiled, seeing his face stained with the juice of wild walnut root.

After hesitating a few moments Se Gol opened his mouth.

"Would you allow me to take ten days' leave?"

"Ten days' leave? What for?"

Axe in hand, he looked inquiringly into Se Gol's face. He had joined the unit only a few days ago and already he was asking for leave.

"I've got to get a gun somewhere. I thought I would be given a gun when joined in the guerrilla army, but they say I'll have to take one from the Japs. Comrade Pak Hung Dok says I may work on kitchen duty until I get a gun but I must have a gun at all costs."

"You think you can get it in ten days?" At his preposterous request, Comrade Kum Song grinned and again asked him in a soft voice.

"As soon as I know where it is, I can get it myself."

"How?"

"I can take it by stealth or knock the enemy down and take it."

"Really? Can you do it with your bare hands?" He asked him meaningly.

"Yes, I can. I took one once but I broke it up and threw it away."

"You took one once?"

"Yes, I did. I used to fell trees at Limyongsu. One day the overseer beat me for working badly. So I grabbed him and threw him into a pool of water. The next day a Jap policeman came to arrest me. He had a rifle. I waited in a thicket and jumped him. I took his gun and smashed it on a rock and it was broken. I threw it away in the thicket and fled to Chonsangdegi. If I can't get another one, I think I can go there and find it and get it repaired."

Comrade Kum Song gave a boisterous laugh. Se Gol

stood with a stupid look on his face, not knowing whether the Comrade Commander had agreed or thought his request too absurd to answer.

The Comrade Commander remained seated across from Se Gol and for a long time talked with him in a lowered voice.

Se Gol went upstream with two basketfuls of wild walnut roots on his shoulders to dope the fish. About an hour later Pyon In Chol who had been doing his washing, stripped to the waist, shouted that fish were flowing downstream. His voice rang through the forest. The guerrillas stopped what they had been doing and ran to the water. Huge bull trouts were floating down belly up. They almost covered the surface of the water. Those that were not yet fully paralyzed by the walnut root juice headed for the shallows, swishing their tails.

Pak Hung Dok jumped into the water fully clothed and threw fish up on the bank. Pyon In Chol straddled a big salmon but when it made a leap he fell back. He complained that he had lost a fish as big as a pony. As meticulous as ever, Cha Gi Yong went into the water with a thick stick and struck the disconcerted fish right and left. The victims fell limp after they had been thrown out on the dry pebbles. The women were shrewdest of all. They had come back from the mountain, carrying greens in a wrapping cloth. Yong Suk stepped into the water fully dressed, and caught the fish in her skirt. She scooped up three times as many fish as any of the men.

"I've got another!"

"There's a big one coming. There!"

"Hit it with the stick! Hit it hard!"

"Throw it there!"

"Here comes another one."

Their shouts shook the forest.

Stripped to the waist, his trousers rolled up to his thighs, Se Gol was wading downstream, spreading his arms and making a hullabaloo as if he were chasing wild beasts.

"In ten minutes they'll wake up and be off. Scoop them up quick! Hurry up!" He yelled at the top of his voice. He was particularly skilled at this sort of thing; he kicked the fish or caught them with a forked stick he had got ready beforehand. Each time he lifted it, a fish flew over to the embankment and rolled down.

As Se Gol had bragged, the guerrillas were going to eat

fish soup for supper to their hearts' content. A dozen or so soldiers gutted the fish on the waterside.

Then there was the sound of men coming out of the opposite thicket. Chin Bong Nam and Han Hung Su were coming towards the water carrying a big bear on a shoulder pole.

"They've got it!"

"Ha, ha, ha."

"Gosh! We'll get fat on grilled bear meat and bull trout soup!"

His trousers soaking with water, Choe Chil Song waded across the stream and pushed Han Hung Su to take the shoulder pole for him.

"You must have had a tough time."

"It was a bit difficult," said Chin Bong Nam who seldom joked. Though when he did, he always hit the mark. He warned Choe Chil Song to walk carefully so as not to break the pole. They came up the grassy embankment after wading across the stream, dipping the bear which was as big as an ox into the water.

There were shouts of joy.

Later Chin Bong Nam confided to Choe Chil Song that what Han Hung Su had really wanted was the bear's gall for the ailing Mother Kang Ban Sok. Now he understood why Han Hung Su, whenever he had time, would dig up medicinal herbs and dry them in the shade at every halt on the march.

The women were sorting a pile of *sabju* and other mountain greens; they had not found any wild *insam*.

Supper time.

They all had huge chunks of bull trout in their soup bowls. They looked at each other, beaming.

"Oh, how delicious!"

"They say that bull trout soup is so tasty that when you're eating it you wouldn't notice if your friend died right beside you. Right?"

"And they say the smell of broiled bull trout brings an estranged daughter-in-law back to her husband's house."

"Who started the fishing today?"

"When your brains don't work, your hands and feet have a hard time, and when your hands and feet work hard, your mouth enjoys comfort, as the saying goes."

"Where is Comrade Pak Hung Dok?"

"Oh, poor chap! He was giving someone a haircut and jumped right into the water and lost his comb and scissors."

Se Gol was the only man who kept quiet. He grinned once in a while, watching his comrades enjoy their supper.

"Wait just one month, then you'll know how to get your gun, just as the man who broke a gun soon finds out that he needs one." Sitting cross-legged, Se Gol recalled the Comrade Commander's words again and again.

The guerrillas' talk was lively as the night advanced in the forest; they talked about how they used to catch fish, how they had hunted roe deers and about hard-working anglers in their native villages.

When the conversation was in full swing Se Gol went to Yong Suk.

"Comrade Yong Suk, come out with your gun."

He looked so grave that she thought there was some trouble and ran into the hut to fetch her gun.

After supper the women guerrillas had been praising Se Gol for his superb skill in fishing.

"The girls said that thanks to you it was like a birthday party today."

"I didn't do anything," he said, embarrassed, raising his unusually long arm and placing his hand on the back of his neck.

Noticing that he was feeling shy she made a step forward.

"You wanted me? What for?"

"Nothing special but...."

Se Gol lifted his face, his eyes twinkling.

"Would you do me a favour, Comrade Yong Suk?"

"What is it?" demanded Yong Suk, tilting her oval face.

"Would you do me a favour, I say."

"If I can."

"You must."

Se Gol looked so earnest that Yong Suk blushed in spite of herself.

"Hand that gun over to me, Comrade Yong Suk."

"What? You want my gun?"

Yong Suk winced, her eyes growing round.

"Don't act as if you'd had a shock. Just lend it to me. You know how badly I need a gun. Today I asked the Comrade Commander to allow me to get one. It's not good to see a big man like me without a gun on his shoulder."

Dumbfounded, Yong Suk took one long look at him and turned on her heels. She didn't feel she could handle this sur-

prise attack by herself. Holding onto the leather strap, she looked round for help. But there was no one by the campfire. Myong Ok had also gone off somewhere.

"Say yes or no. Do, please. Don't keep me in suspense."

"You shouldn't make that kind of joke." Her voice even shook a little.

"If yes, let's go to the company commander right away."

Yong Suk slung the gun off her shoulder and pressed it against her breast; she was afraid he might jump at her suddenly and try to snatch it from her.

"No. How dare you ask me for my gun?"

"Don't be so stubborn, Comrade Yong Suk. I can use it far better than you. Isn't it obvious?"

"What do you mean?" she retorted coldly.

"Let's go over there and sit down."

Ignoring her unhappy mood, he tried quite brazenly to talk her into giving him her gun. He walked briskly over to a fallen tree trunk beside the hut and sat down.

Yong Suk's first instinct was to go off, so utterly bowled over was she at his sublime confidence, but on second thoughts she followed him reluctantly and stood under a tree.

"Comrade Yong Suk, just think. You are the only one in the whole unit who understands me. You helped me get into the guerrillas, didn't you? You know why I joined the guerrillas, don't you? How can I go on like this, barehanded? Why are you making such a wry face, turning your back on me? Now tell me, yes or no?"

Yong Suk knew his unusual audacity but she had never expected him to be as brazen as this. She couldn't refuse outright, and this made her fret. Yong Suk understood how he felt, of course. So she was standing there, silent, when footsteps approached from the direction of the company headquarters. Yong Suk turned round and saw Han Hung Su already in front of the hut. He was making a routine inspection of the company before going to bed.

"What are you doing there?"

Se Gol jumped to his feet from the fallen tree trunk.

"Why, it's Comrade Se Gol."

"Yes."

"How come you are here?"

"I'm here to ask Comrade Yong Suk to do me a favour."

"Why are you both looking so serious?"

"I've just asked her to lend me her gun for a time."

Yong Suk flushed and breathed hard.

"Oh, yes. Lend him your gun, Comrade Yong Suk. He borrows a gun every day for training. Comrade Cha Gi Yong doesn't refuse to lend you his gun surely?"

"No, he doesn't."

"Well, I think it's a good idea to get to know a new gun."

Having settled the problem in a matter-of-fact way, Han Hung Su looked into the hut and asked Yong Suk where all the rest had gone.

Yong Suk raised her blushing face and replied that they had said they were going to Pyon In Chol to hear him play his *tungso* flute, and she thought that was where they had gone.

After Han Hung Su had left, Se Gol did not press her to give up her gun any more. Instead, he made a big concession, suggesting that as advised by the company commander, she lend him her gun for a few hours every day during training. Reluctantly, Yong Suk handed over her gun, calming herself to take it easily.

"Now, you give the commands. I'll make the movements."

She took a couple of paces back and gave a command in a soft but clear voice.

"Shoulder arms!"

Yong Suk's slightly broken but vigorous voice shook the darkness. Se Gol moved his arms smartly and placed the gun on his shoulder. Then he went through some rifle drill to her commands. After that, she didn't know what commands to give next, Se Gol had mastered it all so well. There was silence.

At this moment a beautiful melody played on the *tungso* flute floated in the air. Both of them, as if in agreement, held their breath and strained their ears to listen. The full moon swam out of the clouds and cast its brilliant beams through the branches of the trees onto their heads and shoulders.

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The guerrillas marched in fine array, with Cha Gi Yong in a cheerful mood, carrying a red flag at the head. The flag fluttered and touched the shoulder of Han Hung Su who was

right behind him. Then came a double line of guerrillas, marching briskly. All were in uniform, with rifles on their shoulders. Thanks to Pak Hung Dok's incessant nagging, everybody looked neat and tidy. All were around 20 years of age, strong, with robust faces and bright, flashing eyes. They were full of youthful ardour. They were marching evenly, with an easy and natural gait. Yet they were keeping in step with each other, and in line.

A little behind them was Comrade Kum Song, with two bodyguards bringing up the rear.

The Tunghua street consisting of several hundred houses was lined with people on both sides. The guerrillas waved to them as they marched by. Posters pasted on the fences had slogans written on them, such as "Overthrow Japanese Imperialism!" and "Long Live Korean Independence!"

Chu Ho Rim waited for Comrade Kum Song to reach the gate of his headquarters, flanked by his deputy commander, staff officer, adviser and other high-ranking officers. Of a peasant type, Chu Ho Rim was not very tall and looked very shrewd. What was most striking about him was his powerful voice and his decisiveness.

After the formal reception Chu Ho Rim took Comrade Kum Song into his house.

"General Kum Song is here, wife," he called into the house, as he entered the main gate. The kitchen door opened and a middle-aged woman with her hair in a bun came hurrying out. She stopped short in front of him and bowed.

"You must be tired after your long journey. How is your mother?"

Chu Ho Rim's wife had heard about Mother Kang Ban Sok's illness, and after her greeting, wiped her eye with the strings of her jacket. Comrade Kum Song returned her greetings cordially and conveyed his mother's regards to her.

He was ushered into a room that had been got ready to receive the distinguished guest. There was nothing unusual in the arrangement; an elaborately polished walnut table stood on a gleaming straw mat, with a sitting cushion in a snow-white cover on either side. The three-roomed house was not large but it was kept neat and tidy. The master obviously led a simple frugal life. A plain military uniform hung high up on the wall and there was a moderate-sized scroll on the closet wall with a stanza from General Nam I's poem on it.

Having invited his guest to sit down, Chu Ho Rim sat down himself by the western window giving a view of the snake gourd vines outside.

"Time is like flowing water, as the saying goes. It seems to me that I was at your father's funeral at Fusung only yesterday, but nearly seven years have passed since then. Anyhow I'm very happy to see you, General."

Remembering the past with deep emotion, Chu Ho Rim scrutinized his guest's features. He was very like his father, Kim Hyong Jik. As they talked Chu Ho Rim several times found himself imagining that he was sitting opposite Kim Hyong Jik. He was very sorry that Kim Hyong Jik was no longer with them. The Korean independence movement was in a sad state and its prospects were not too good, but unfortunately he had had no one with whom he could discuss this matter as man to man.

"Had your father been alive, our independence movement would not have been in this miserable state. Our patriots are scattered in all directions and the strength of the independence movement is gradually sagging. Meanwhile, people of doubtful origin, advocating a variety of isms, are making a lot of noise all round. While things remain like this, the independence movement will never do well."

His melancholy face shone yellow in the sun shining in through the window. Long, sharp eyebrows and firm lips fully revealed the will with which he had fought the harsh ordeals of life.

After a short pause, Chu Ho Rim continued.

"Your father used to tell us to aim high. At that time I didn't grasp the full meaning of what he said but now I think I do, and it is giving me a most valuable lesson. He always used to say that to liberate the homeland the people must unite as one. He himself organized the Korean National Association and took numerous steps to rally us white-clad people. But now there is nothing that can claim to have inherited his will. There are so many 'departments', 'associations' and what not and though they talk about mergers and unity, all they do is talk. What is more, the Japs are growing more malicious and more cunning. It is simply heart-rending.

"On the 8th of last month my troops came up against the Kwantung Army's 'punitive force' entrenched in Mukden and had to retreat. It could not be avoided because the Japs brought

in armoured vehicles, planes and quick-firing guns. We simply were no match for them. Even if we had managed to push forward, we couldn't have been sure of winning independence, but in fact we had to retreat. It was heart-breaking! I shed tears of blood.

"On the battleground you either win or lose. There is no third way. The vanquished, even if he escapes the enemy's sword, should cut off his own head. But I couldn't do that.

"All this is because we lack your father's leadership. After he died, we of the independence movement became orphans. We have no one we can rely on. Heaven is so merciless. Many good-for-nothings like me are alive while he died before his time. Why? They say you cannot gain your desires easily in this world, and for us that certainly is true."

Chu Ho Rim gave a heavy sigh, and his eyes brimmed with tears.

After a while he seemed to realize that he had become too excited and, sitting up properly, opened a paper sliding door.

"Wife, you should bring us some refreshments. Do you not realize that a nation's destiny is being discussed here? You should not keep us waiting."

The clatter of dishes could be heard in the kitchen and his wife asked him to wait a few minutes.

Comrade Kum Song had often heard about Chu Ho Rim from his father. But he seemed to have changed. Broken-hearted, he was feeling the emptiness of life.

Looking sometimes at the serene early summer sky, sometimes at the sullen Chu Ho Rim, Comrade Kum Song thought of the road the Korean nationalist movement had traversed so far.

At the "Peace Conference" at The Hague the representative of a ruined nation had disemboweled himself and threw out his intestines in righteous indignation. From then on the nationalists had carried on a vigorous independence campaign until the March First People's Uprising. However, they were disgusted with the "Provisional Government in Shanghai" which had changed its structure every other day and engaged only in drawing up a list of ministers. And their brute courage that showed in their discussions on what they called the merger of the three groups or the rule of "Kukmin-bu" had subsided. Even the recalcitrant conservatives who were still attached to the "Royal Families of the Li Dynasty" were completely frus-

trated when Li Chok crossed Korea Strait to pay his "royal visit". The "brave ladies" with gold rings on their fingers advocating doing without beef or eggs to economize and pay indemnities to Japan to regain independence, were disheartened. So were the reformists who had clamoured for "autonomy" and "suffrage" and stressed that the battle against ignorance was more urgent than independence. Only the Independence Army had claimed the people's attention, because it was determined to go on fighting, collecting funds for arms and shooting Japanese police. But this army was scattered as far and wide as the islands in the South Sea and its leadership was going to seed. Simultaneously with the split among the bourgeois nationalists, one group had fallen over the precipice of reform and treachery, another into the decline of despair and frustration and still another had made a dramatic move towards the heights of communism. The first group had disarmed and surrendered to the Japanese imperialists, the second had buried their guns in the ground and cooped themselves up in their houses. The third, who still carried arms, were at the crossroads, wondering which way to go. Chu Ho Rim who, gripped by an empty feeling, was now absently gazing out of the window belonged to the third group of staunch fighters, together with O Dong Rin who had been murdered by the Japanese imperialists some time ago. Like autumn leaves falling day by day, his foothold was shrinking, yet he remained true to his principles, and still commanded a sizable armed force. It was said that with the encircling enemy forces without and active spies within, he and his army, though still armed, were at their wits' end. Most of the soldiers were of peasant origin and their morale was sky high. But through a lack of coherent leadership they were suffering losses and dropping out of the ranks. They needed to be saved and led firmly to fight against Japanese marauders.

After supper Comrade Kum Song told him briefly why he had come here to visit him.

"You are quite right. I believe that's what your father would have wished to see. We must join hands by all means."

Then he added that Kim Hyong Jik had stressed the need for the nationalist movement to develop into a communist movement. However, when their conversation touched on the crux of the problem Chu Ho Rim seemed to be vaguely agitated. This was inevitable for he had foreseen that this meeting with

Comrade Kum Song would be the turning point of his fortunes which he feared, he knew not why. Chu Ho Rim had readily agreed to cooperate with him but he felt as if something in his heart was urging him to back down.

"Let's join together. As for the details, we must discuss them tomorrow. I'll think it over, and as you know, these are matters that I cannot decide rashly."

Seeing through the complication in his mind, Comrade Kum Song gladly accepted his suggestion and departed.

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The women guerrillas had been billeted at a tenant's house. The head of this family of eight was Old Tokgo, an energetic man of nearly 50. He had been a veteran, ambitious platoon leader of the Independence Army. But he had resigned the year before and was now engaged in farming, because he viewed the army with pessimism on top of which he had quarrelled with Adviser Hwang. His eldest son had left home for a construction site three years ago to make money but there had been no news of him. The second son was serving the Independence Army here—Old Tokgo had allowed him to join partly because it exempted him from the taxes the Independence Army levied twice a year and partly because he still had a lingering affection for his old army. He still enforced a rigid feudal code in his family of eight, including his two daughters-in-law, and had them well under his thumb.

He made no comment on the news of the guerrillas' arrival. However, as soon as he saw from the distance that the ranks of the guerrillas were far more orderly than those of the Independence Army, he nodded approvingly. But when he heard that they were Communists, he shook his head in disapproval.

"When a hen crows the house will be ruined. That's what they say."

Old Tokgo's grumbling reached Yong Suk's ears as she was pushing her knapsack into the parlour. This gentle-natured girl was disconcerted and ran out to where the chimney stood.

"What shall we do, Myong Ok? He says when a hen crows the house will be ruined."

"Who on earth said so?"

"Hush! An old man is in the upper room."

Yong Suk drew a catfish moustache, running her fingers from her nostrils up to the tips of her earlobes.

"If she doesn't crow, the house won't be ruined. Right?"

"Shall we move to another house?"

"Don't be stupid. We must educate this feudalist. Let's do like this. Come over here."

Yong Suk was gentle and intelligent, while Myong Ok was a trifle flippant. Now she drew herself up, went to the kitchen to greet the woman of the house, and then along to the upper room. Unknowing, Yong Suk was right behind her, pulling Hye Yong by the hand.

"How do you do, father?"

Myong Ok took off her cap and made a grave bow, softly going down on one knee and modestly dropping her head. She looked so charmingly well-bred that her comrades gazed at her with wide-open eyes.

At her unexpected greeting, Old Tokgo winced, and slightly lowered his head, moving back a couple of paces.

"Oh, no, don't.... Why, I thank you."

Yong Suk and Hye Yong followed suit.

When they were out in the opposite room, they could hear his coarse voice asking for a bowl of water. Myong Ok snatched the bowl from his wife and again went into his room. Slightly turning her face aside, she knelt down to hand him the bowl.

Soon afterwards they went out to the kitchen garden with hoes in their hands and started to weed the maize patch. Old Tokgo walked back and forth in the yard, watching them at work.

"The girls are modest enough though they are Communists."

"How can these women be Communists?" grumbled the big-built Mrs. Pak of Milyang, his wife.

"Oh, they weed better than old peasants. You should heap up the soil for the maize the way they are doing."

"How splendid they are! These women who fight with guns...."

Her husband put out his pipe and cleared his throat.

Wielding her hoe, Yong Suk broke into a song. Hye Yong,

who would always follow others' example, joined in the singing in a clear voice. They finished the whole garden with an amazing speed and then went over to the next piece of land. Five villagers were hoeing the maize field next door which had been left unweeded for so many days that Old Tokgo had warned them it would soon be overgrown. His neighbour, or the House from Chasong, had hired the mutual aid team for today, a team of three young housewives and two middle-aged men.

The weeds such as pigweeds, *barengi*, *chobengi* and bind-weeds had grown so high that they had to be pulled up by hand. The women guerrillas weeded quickly. Yong Suk was the fastest and most dexterous of all and her furrows were neat and smooth. She was surprisingly deft at heaping the soil and pushing the grass into the earth, roots up.

Again they sang. Their faces all aglow, Yong Suk and Myong Ok sang a duet. The villagers stopped their hoeing now and then to listen to them sing. The song was quite new to them; it was entirely different from those crooning songs from the gramophone or the six-word folk songs.

*The capitalists and landlords
In the bedrooms of imposing houses devour.
The workers and peasants
Shedding blood and sweat labour....*

Those in the next field turned to watch the singing lasses and passers-by stopped to listen.

That evening Gwan Uk, Old Tokgo's second son, dropped in at home.

"Did you meet the guerrillas, son?" Tokgo who was sitting on the veranda addressed his son standing with his back against the fence up which the pumpkin vines had just begun to creep.

"Meet the guerrillas? I even talked to them."

"Well, what are they like, compared to the Independence Army?..."

His tall, sturdy son grinned broadly, taking off his flintlock and leaning it against the edge of the veranda.

"How our boys envy them!"

"They are Communists?" Old Tokgo raised his thick eyebrows.

"Yes, they are. Advisor Hwang always says, 'The Communists are wicked fellows. Li Wan Yong sold our country to

the Japs, the Communists will sell it to Russia.' But we were all spellbound right away. You used to say, Father, that outside shows inside. They look wonderful! Their uniforms are clean, they are well-girded and they do regular drill. Their guns are not like our flintlocks; they have the same 38-rifles as the Japs and most of them brand new at that. The Esteemed Commander Chu always says that he will collect war funds and import modern guns from Switzerland or Czechoslovakia, but when will we really be rid of these flintlocks, *totung* and *yangpo* guns?"

"Where did they say they got such guns?"

"Their stories make our hearts leap. They say they raid the Japs and take theirs."

"Do they really?"

Old Tokgo's large eyes sparkled.

"They do indeed. I made friends with the youngest guerrilla named Pyon In Chol, who is boarding at the back village. This Mr. Pyon said that the guerrillas call each other comrades on an equal footing, instead of Esteemed or Your Excellencies as we do. He said that each gun the guerrillas have is soaked with the blood of their comrades-in-arms."

"Then the people of guerrilla areas don't have to pay war fund taxes as we do here in autumn and spring!"

"Of course they don't."

"Then the rumour that the guerrillas are Communists must be unfounded."

"But they say they believe in communism."

"Do they? I don't understand that. All that would be impossible if they were Communists.... Keep out of their way, son."

At this moment Yong Suk came round the corner of the wattle fence, with a water jar on her head. Blushing, she walked lightly into the kitchen. Perhaps her well-balanced figure looked more beautiful in uniform. Inside the fence, Myong Ok was hulling millet in the wooden mortar while Hye Yong squatted on her haunches, winnowing.

"If the guerrillas stay here for a month, our farming will go well."

"These are women, the men will be better, no doubt. You must do as well as they do. Then people'll believe your declaration that you are going to win independence and that you'll reclaim the homeland. I know you are not good-for-nothings.

The thing is, many of your leaders are rotten. Commander Chu must have quite a headache trying to gain independence with that lot."

Old Tokgo pushed a big wad of tobacco into the large bronze-capped pipe and gripped it between his teeth.

"What the hell did the guerrillas come here for, do you know?"

"They say they've come here to work together with us to beat the Japanese. Then we can win independence earlier."

"Who is their commander?"

"General Kum Song, I was told."

The father's eyes grew large again, and he repeated the name several times.

"Well, did you see the General?"

"No, I didn't."

"You said you went to the entrance to the village to welcome them."

"But I could not spot him."

"Didn't you see a specially good horse or a gold-tasseled sedan chair?"

"They were all on foot."

"Wasn't there an old person among them?"

"All of them are young."

"How strange! The General must be venerable and must have a striking appearance, so that you can recognize him easily...."

"I'm not sure, though. Our Commander Chu isn't that big a man, is he?"

"That's why you are stunned and harassed by the enemy. If something great is to be done, you have to look imposing."

The son's face suddenly coloured a deep pink but he had no answer.

When he had finished his supper, the master of the house sat down on the veranda and expressed a wish to talk to the three women soldiers. Myong Ok sat opposite him, the other two just behind her.

"I want to find out something. You'll understand me, I hope."

Old Tokgo sat straight up, filled his pipe with tobacco and spoke with a dignified air.

"I was told that your commander is General Kum Song. Could you tell me all about him? About his family background,

his home, his age, what his parents are doing, his education, his career, and so on."

After a pause of few moments Yong Suk began to speak. Myong Ok was the more eloquent of the three, but when it came to information about the General, Yong Suk knew more than anyone else. Yong Suk told him roughly what she had heard from Mother Kang Ban Sok and Comrade Chol Ju while at Hsiaoshaho. In addition, Hye Yong told all about his activities in the Kirin area.

Old Tokgo listened, puffing away at his pipe in silence. When they had finished talking, he smacked his knee and exclaimed in admiration:

"That's splendid. That's really encouraging. Korea has a splendid saviour at last, it seems. Do you think I can meet him?"

"Why not? We will pass on your wish to the General."

At dawn they prepared to leave. Under the programme minutely mapped out by Chon Gwang Sik, the guerrilla unit had been divided into small teams to do political work among the people living for many miles around. The three women guerrillas had been assigned to different teams and left for different places.

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The shrewd and agile Staff Officer Choe was sitting by the window, looking out, his chin cupped in his hands. Nearby he could see an Independence Army company barracks. The soldiers were hurrying in and out of the yard. This was a familiar enough scene, but that day it somehow irritated him more than usual. His soldiers looked unkempt compared with the guerrillas. Moreover, they were a dull lot. He did not know what Chu Ho Rim thought about it but he could not help feeling rather depressed. Quite frankly, the guerrillas were so splendid that in a way he felt jealous in spite of himself. They were well-disciplined, high-spirited and virile. The villagers welcomed the guerrillas and vied each other to take them into their homes. Wherever they went the guerrillas formed an integral part of the people. They swept the yard, carried water, took up hoes to

weed the fields. If a villager fell ill, they sat beside him through the night and would make long journeys to get him medicine.

"But how about us? We drill day and night, shout commands, blow bugles and ride horses. We bustle about, from high-ranking officers down to privates, but my men have no confidence and look fed up. Civilians keep out of our way and are apparently afraid of us. There is a saying: The people's mind's Heaven's mind. So this means that we must already be breaking up."

The Independence Army had always kept itself busy urging young people to join up, appealing to the people to supply it with the sinews of war wherever it went, trying to get weapons, enlightening the people and punishing unlawful acts to enforce justice. Yet, far from increasing, its ranks were steadily dwindling, its discipline was getting lax and the soldiers were becoming dispirited.

The night before, Staff Officer Choe had worried so much he had not had a wink of sleep. Advisor Hwang had not been happy about the guerrillas from the start. He gave them the cold shoulder because they were Communists. He was just bragging, cooped up in his room, though he did not know how things were going. Chu Ho Rim warned him not to be rash, proposing a wait-and-see attitude. Because he was broad-minded and had his own convictions we might wait and see. But this time joining forces with them or not could well decide the whole future of the Independence Army.

Irritated by these bitter thoughts, Staff Officer Choe left home to visit Chu Ho Rim. On entering the front gate, he saw Chu on the veranda talking to Advisor Hwang, both smoking cigarettes. Chu was glad to see Choe. After exchanging a few words with him, Staff Officer Choe expressed his views, paying no attention to Advisor Hwang. Raising his slightly protruding chin which showed stubbornness, he explained exactly how matters stood and made his suggestions.

"To my mind, Esteemed Commander, taking the situation into account, you should decide on joining hands with the guerrillas, joining hands firmly. Otherwise, we'll meet the same fate as the grass and trees when nipped by the frost in late autumn."

"Staff Officer! How dare you make such thoughtless remarks in the presence of the Esteemed Commander? You have gone too far in criticizing us, in likening us to frostbitten leaves.

Do you mean that we are all virtually dead? On the contrary. We are alive and strong. You seem to be much discouraged at the series of setbacks we have suffered recently. Don't be disheartened. History tells that the rise and fall of a nation involves as many ups and downs as a mountain range. He who is determined to accomplish the great cause for the homeland should not be put off by minor setbacks."

Advisor Hwang, firmly built and dignified, adjusted his feeling and tone of voice, closely studying Chu Ho Rim's mood.

After remonstrating with Staff Officer Choe, he presented his views.

"I hope that when you negotiate with the Communists, Your Excellency, you will take into consideration the 'Heiho Incident' that flooded the whole town with blood. You should also remember the 'May 30 Uprising' the year before last and take into account the fact that the Communists have all along opposed us nationalists.

"As you know, Esteemed Commander, communism is fundamentally opposed to nationalism. They claim that the revolution doesn't go well because of the nationalists, but they advocate internationalism. They only stand for the proletariat of all lands; they don't care about their own people, their own nation, their own compatriots. In Korea there is no large proletariat. Their slogans may suit capitalist countries but they don't apply to our feudal institutions. Let me cite a glaring example. The Korean Communist Party founded in 1925 was dissolved. Why? The Communist International was wise in taking this action. This substantiates what I say, that nationalism suits Korea, not communism. The Korean communist movement has so far been a mass of factional strifes, dirtier even than in our nationalist movement. Just look at them running amuck to 'rebuild the Party' or 'restore the Party'. I'm not going to be long-winded and tedious. But I'll be pleased if Your Excellency sees fit to consider my views."

Advisor Hwang put another cigarette in his long ivory cigarette holder. A sly smile flashed across his lips. Chu Ho Rim lifted his head getting bald in front and gave a long guffaw.

"I'll take both your views fully into account. But..."

Chu Ho Rim could not continue instantly. Both of them were right. However, he could not express his full agreement with either side.

Puffing his cigarette, he tried to take a broad-minded view, and went on.

"We have to join hands with them. Why should we hesitate? We cannot stay as we are. The situation doesn't allow it. I firmly believe that Kim Hyong Jik's son is not one of the kind of Communists we know. As soon as you meet him you'll see I'm right."

He took a deep breath and looked out through the front gate.

"Ah, here comes General Kum Song."

He jumped to his feet and hurried out to receive his guest. Staff Officer Choe and Advisor Hwang also got to their feet.

The host went out to meet him by the front gate and to show him in.

When he was seated in the room, Chu Ho Rim introduced Comrade Kum Song to his assistants.

"General Kum Song here is the son of Kim Hyong Jik who had a reputation as the great leader of the Korean independence movement. As determined to win independence as we, he dedicated all the ardour of his youth to this great task and set up the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army. He has come here in person to see us. I'm glad that you have now made the acquaintance of the General."

He then introduced his men to General Kum Song.

"This man here is Advisor Hwang Gwang Il of our Independence Army. He was born in Seoul. Under the influence of his father who had long been committed to national liberation, he has for many years spent great effort on the sacred cause of independence. And this here is Mr. Choe Il Guk. He is the staff officer who looks after all the household chores for our Independence Army."

Chu Ho Rim politely introduced both. He was so modest and informal that anyone would even now take him for a peasant if he were holding a hoe.

The newly acquainted officers nodded to each other and entered into small talk. Then they exchanged a few words about the Korean situation and moved on to the international situation. Inevitably, the conversation turned to Japanese imperialist rule and the Korean nationalist movement. Comrade Kum Song artlessly guided the conversation this way rather than announce the purpose of his visit here, or state how the nationalists or Communists should act.

As the conversation proceeded, he raised the point Chu Ho Rim was most anxious about.

"By the way, I suggest we exchange opinions on how the Korean people should fight Japanese imperialism."

Looking at the people on the other side Comrade Kum Song took the initiative. He felt that the right moment had come.

"We believe that the struggle against Japan must be nationwide; it must be waged by all the thirty million Koreans, not just by a few patriots, or parties or by some sections of the people."

Then he spoke in simple terms on matters of principle with regard to the anti-Japanese national united front. He analysed the present positions of different strata of the people, their anti-Japanese inclinations and the historical missions to be carried out by them. Since the problem was a delicate one, his arguments could not but be developed in a complex and profound way, but he untied the knots one by one using suitable examples and metaphors.

"Let me repeat. To free our homeland, all the people must unite as one to oppose the Japanese imperialists, our inveterate enemy. The workers must come out carrying their hammers, and the peasants should bring their hoes. Those who have money must donate money, those who have knowledge must contribute knowledge and those who have physical strength must offer their physical strength."

"You are quite right."

Chu Ho Rim's face went red with excitement and he exclaimed his delight while Staff Officer Choe and Advisor Hwang nodded their approval.

"We the thirty millions must explode all together, like a barrel of gunpowder. We who have made up our minds to free the country, arms in hand, must be the detonator. In other words, we must be the spark to rouse the whole nation. The enemy has occupied our land with bayonets, and we can only be free if we ourselves take up arms."

"Yes, you are right, absolutely right."

Chu Ho Rim indicated his agreement by striking his knee with the palm of his thickly-knuckled hand.

The talk was gradually reaching a climax.

Comrade Kum Song continued.

"We Koreans are a wise people, a people proud of their five thousand years of history and their ancient culture. We

have never invaded or plundered other nations, nor have we ever allowed anyone to challenge us. Neither Sui nor Tang, nor the Japanese during the Imjin Patriotic War could touch us. Having mapped out the strategy to annihilate the armed forces of Sui, Ulji Mun Dok wrote in that satirical poem: '...Now that you have won the war and accomplished many feats, you had better be content and return home'; by doing this he demonstrated our nation's dignity and valour. Then he wiped out the enemy forces on the Chongchon-gang River.

"When the Japanese hordes invaded our country our women at the fortress of Mt. Haengju-san repulsed them, carrying stones in their aprons. And there is no reason why the Korean people cannot overthrow the rule of the Japanese imperialists."

Chu Ho Rim laughed aloud in satisfaction and Staff Officer Choe and Advisor Hwang also laughed. But Hwang's laughter sounded a trifle sardonic. Chu Ho Rim took no notice—he hastened to speak of the matter for which he was so anxious to find a solution.

"May I ask a question, General? It may be blunt, but I must ask in order to make everything clear. What is your doctrine? Before you answer, let me make my own position clear; I oppose the yellow Japanese aggression and red Russian aggression equally. In fact, my position is that we do not want foreign colours, that we must safeguard the pure colour of our white-clad people."

The blood rushed to Chu Ho Rim's face and he began to fan himself with a fan woven out of cattails.

"Bring a bowl of water, would you?" He shouted into the next room. The water was brought. There were beads of condensation on the fresh kettle.

Chu Ho Rim offered his guests water as a token of civility and then gulped down three bowlfuls in quick succession.

"By the way, I heard that the guerrillas, as soon as they arrived, gathered the people together, made speeches and held meetings." Advisor Hwang made this pointless remark, his glistening cheeks quivering.

"As always you are hasty, Advisor Hwang. And prejudiced," criticized Staff Officer Choe. He then complained.

"Sometimes I cannot understand you, Esteemed Commander Chu. You used to say, 'Instead of worrying about doctrines or isms, we must first liberate our country.' Yet it is evident that now you are hostile to communism."

"It's very strange and at the same time regrettable that you are ignorant of my position, Staff Officer Choe. My position is firm and crystal-clear. You say I am opposed to communism, yet I have always sympathized with it. Kim Hyong Jik told me more than once that Korea must be independent but we must build a system where the workers and peasants are free from exploitation and oppression, not a capitalist and landlord system. Also, he said that Lenin was a great man and often told me about the October Revolution in Russia. I have tried all along to be true to his teaching that the nationalist movement must develop into a communist movement. And my position remains unchanged. However, I am strongly opposed to the communism those disgraceful fellows are clamouring for. As the General said just now, all the thirty millions must pool their forces to fight the Japanese dogs but the Communists are pitting fellow countrymen against each other, aren't they? Take the 'May 30 Uprising' some years ago for example. They agitate the tenants to hit back at the landlords and egg the workers on to attack the manufacturers. That is nothing but fratricide. I cannot follow people who insult the fine civil customs of this Eastern country and destroy our patriotic spirit. Another thing. The Communists are fighting among themselves, in factions such as the 'Shanghai group', 'Seoul group', 'M-L group', and what not. What can they do when they behave like that?"

Chu Ho Rim drank a fourth bowl of water and fanned himself. It was not very hot, but beads of perspiration trickled down his face.

"So you want to dye yourself a bit red, Mr. Choe?" Advisor Hwang said sarcastically, mopping the sweat off his neck with his handkerchief.

Although Hwang kept up his attack Staff Officer Choe would not back down. Chu Ho Rim acted as peacemaker, saying that there were positive as well as negative aspects to both their positions.

Comrade Kum Song raised his head and threw out his chest. His sharp eyes pierced through the musty air in the room and glittered in the rays of the evening sun that seeped through the bamboo blind. The erroneous views of all three men were muddled, based on their ideological limitations, misunderstanding and stupidity. Yet, you could hardly tell if it was

simply downright ignorance or whether they had hidden motives. Clearly they were trying hard to sound out his position.

"Mr. Chu Ho Rim, let me tell you right away; I'm a Communist."

"What?!"

Chu Ho Rim raised his eyebrows and sat up. For though he had indeed guessed that Comrade Kum Song was a Communist, he had hardly expected him to say so openly, especially as he himself had just declared that he was against communism.

"Don't be surprised. It is a fact, so it is better that we make it clear right from the very start."

Smiling, Comrade Kum Song looked round. Staff Officer Choe and Advisor Hwang appeared equally stunned.

It occurred to Comrade Kum Song that this was the moment to press his point. It was necessary to break through their misunderstanding and prejudice and to get to the root of the matter.

"Mr. Chu!" he said affectionately and went on talking.

He explained the grim truth of the class struggle, pointed to the position of the nationalist movement in this struggle and analysed Chu Ho Rim's own role. Then he explained logically why only the communist movement could make it possible to win back the homeland and bring their country a prosperous future. He made a thorough analysis of the country's present and future, and of the destiny of the Korean people. His words went home mercilessly to Chu Ho Rim, clarifying everything he wanted to know, everything he was worried about, his agonies and his apprehensions.

Comrade Kum Song paid special attention to Chu's negative attitude towards what he called "the Communists as I know them."

While explaining the communist movement in general, he also described, with many examples, how the young Korean communist movement harshly repressed by the Japanese imperialists had had to face great suffering and danger, and so had made quite a few mistakes. Without the least hesitation he criticized sectarian elements for engineering the "May 30 Uprising" and for their scramble for the lead by forming various groups and sects. He spent many hours analysing and reviewing the Korean nationalist movement as a whole and finally pointed to the vital need to form the anti-Japanese national united front and to fight a nationwide battle against Japan.

Chu Ho Rim looked away every time he caught the General's shining eye. Fumbling with his fan and cigarette case he tried to recover his composure, but the more he did so, the more hard-pressed he felt. And yet, occasionally he would feel a lightness as if the deep-seated anguish of his heart had lifted. Anyhow he sat there consumed with excitement, making odd noises from time to time that could have been groans or expressions of admiration.

Comrade Kum Song went on in a gentle and quiet voice. "...We deem it necessary to unite all forces that oppose the Japanese imperialists. We insist that the anti-Japanese national united front should be formed around the workers and peasants who are oppressed and exploited more harshly than anyone else; it should take in small and moderate-sized merchants and manufacturers, intellectuals and even patriotic capitalists and religious men, particularly all those who, like you, are fighting devotedly for national liberation.

"For the present, we the guerrillas and you the Independence Army must first unite and lead the battle against Japanese imperialism. We could pool our efforts for coordinated operations or could have definite zones of activity to dismember the enemy. That is what we are here for.

"The Japanese imperialists appear to be strong right now, running amok with their bayonets, but once we Koreans are closely united to fight them, we can drive them out of our territory by our own effort. Our forces must destroy the enemy troops with arms. The workers must rise in the factories and streets and the peasants must revolt against the enemy in the countryside. Our youth, women, intellectuals, religious men and merchants must all rise up and fight. Here, we are the main pillars. For it rests with us, who carry arms, whether or not this solemn mission is fulfilled, whether or not our homeland becomes free or remains a foreign colony for ever."

He finished speaking and looked out of the door. The shadow cast by the fence now filled the yard and the sky was aglow with the glorious sunset.

Chu Ho Rim lit another cigarette and, making a bit wry face, said:

"I quite understand what you mean, General. As I've told Staff Officer Choe, Kim Hyong Jik would always say so. However, reality is...."

Chu Ho Rim then talked for a long time, expounding his views. At times he sounded grave and at times burst into gusts of hearty laughter. Not once, however, did he reveal his confused innermost thoughts. His continual wavering was based on what he couldn't say out loud. He had strong prejudice that for the most part the Communists were against the Independence Army. Yet, he had not meant any harm during the "Heiho Incident" or the "May 30 Uprising" although he had been unhappy about it. And it was really no concern of his if the "Shanghai group" had hit at the "Seoul group" or the "M-L group" had attacked the "Tuesday group". For amid the eternally rolling waves of the world such errors and losses were inevitable. But a loss of his own he could never tolerate, however trifling. Three months ago there had been an annoying incident. A certain Pak, a Communist, had come here from Seoul through the northern region of Chientao and joined his unit. For a month or so he had worked clandestinely to persuade some 20 soldiers to desert with him. His scheme was discovered. There had been similar incidents before, and Chu had executed Pak himself without the slightest compunction. In fact, he was now deeply moved and manifested his unreserved agreement to all that Comrade Kum Song had said. But he could not mention this incident to him now though it had been on the tip of his tongue. Perhaps he would get another opportunity to speak to him frankly, and would not discuss it right now. So he asked the first question that crossed his mind.

"Let me ask you a question. How do you guerrillas get your war funds? Do you collect them from the people or do you have some other source?"

"We fight without funds."

"But where do you get your weapons?"

"We seize them from the Japanese army."

"You do? That's fine!"

Both Chu Ho Rim and Staff Officer Choe expressed their approval.

Comrade Kum Song then said that it was necessary to watch the Japanese imperialists' manoeuvres to disunite the Korean nation, and the turncoats and spies working hand in glove with them.

"We must be on the alert, you think?"

"Indeed we must."

Chu Ho Rim could scarcely conceal his agitation.

"The enemy is not sleeping."

"He certainly isn't." Chu Ho Rim gave a hollow laugh. Whether or not he knew how matters stood in his army, it was not obvious.

At this moment the front gate was flung open and an Independence Army soldier came running in.

"Isn't that Om Chi Hwan of Platoon Three?" Advisor Hwang raised his head to look at him.

"I'm sure he has returned from Kanggye. Oh, my God! What's wrong?"

Staff Officer Choe rushed towards the veranda.

The tall, dark-eyed young man called the staff officer at the door, but he couldn't get his breath to speak. His trousers were torn and his chest was smeared with blood.

Now having reached the yard, Staff Officer Choe held the trembling soldier by the arm and asked impatiently.

"What's happened? Hurry up, tell me!"

"Yes, sir. The...."

The soldier, his flintlock on his shoulder, was trying to get his breath back. His shoulders heaved and fell.

"Come on!"

"We carried out our mission safely at Kanggye and on our way back we were pursued by the enemy and Pi Sang Su was shot...."

"Is he dead?"

"No, sir, he isn't. The enemy pursued us and we fled. But we heard gunshots ahead and from behind. I was sure it was the end of us. At that moment the guerrillas came and saved us. They carried Pi Sang Su on their backs and are now in the Platoon Three barracks."

"Is he seriously hurt?" Chu Ho Rim's husky voice sounded from behind the staff officer.

"The guerrillas are dressing his wound now, sir."

Staff Officer Choe heaved a sigh of relief and let Om Chi Hwan withdraw.

Everything was in such a state of confusion by now that conversation was out of the question. Chu Ho Rim and Staff Officer Choe were deeply sorry when Comrade Kum Song bade them farewell, and they too left the house to have a look at the wounded man.

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Han Hung Su and Choe Chil Song were walking through the wheat fields. Soon they would catch sight of the mountain soaring skywards.

The mountains and plains were alive with the vigour of early summer, and the breeze tossed waves across the wheat fields and brought them a fresh fragrance.

"This is a lovely season, Comrade Choe."

Han Hung Su raised his face as charming as a girl's and gazed up at the boundless blue sky. After nearly a month of marching through the forests, Han Hung Su felt quite refreshed.

"The busy season has arrived."

Choe Chil Song knew this was the busiest time for the farmers. Weeding would be in full swing on the potato and foxtail millet fields.

Han Hung Su walked a few steps ahead of Choe Chil Song. They were both in uniform and were on their way to a village 30 *ri* away for political work.

The larks sang overhead—two or three dark dots shooting across the transparent azure blue sky. All of a sudden they reminded Han Hung Su of his own village.

"Comrade Choe, you say you are from Hoeryong?"

"Yes. My village is ten *ri* from Hoeryong down on the Tuman-gang. This place is very much like it."

"It must be a nice place. I was born and bred at Namyang, which is a nice place too."

Both were quiet, caught up in a deep feeling of nostalgia.

Han Hung Su's home at Namyang was on a slope close to the Tuman-gang River. His father was a linesman on the railway, often absent from home for days on end. Han Hung Su had to walk 15 *ri* to school, his school things tied up in a cloth. On his way he had often heard the larks singing in the sky as now. Sundays he spent in the fields. He would lie on his back on the grass, looking up at the larks, and indulge in wild fancies, that flew up into the blue sky and took the ambitious boy anywhere he wanted. Sometimes he laid hooks and brought larks home at dusk. He made a wicker cage, and the

birds would stick their bills into the feeding trough, their crowns erect. His reticent old father who had built railways with pick and shovel all his life would hardly say a word to his son for days. An only son, Han Hung Su had always been weak—his parents used to worry about it but he did not have to lie in bed all the time. One day he was absent from school and, for five days running, tossed about in agony. Then he came out on the veranda and sat there quietly in a pensive mood. All of a sudden he took down the cage and released his pair of larks into the blue sky.

"Why did you set free the birds when you had looked after them so carefully?"

Instead of answering his father, who was grinning, Han Hung Su said that he was leaving for Huatien. A month later he wrote a letter home, saying that he was studying at the Hwasong Uisuk School and had met a wonderful friend. Then he went to Kirin with Comrade Kum Song to carry out the activities of the Young Communist League, and then on to Chialun where he took part in the preparations for the armed struggle he was now engaged in.

Han Hung Su undid his two top buttons to reveal his chest, something he rarely did even on the hottest days. A smile kept hovering round his lips and he walked with a lively step, his pistol swinging at his hip. They had turned off a ridge, crossed a pass and were descending a slope when suddenly they heard a gunshot.

"Hands up and we won't shoot!"

The enemy's shouts were heard nearby.

Han Hung Su climbed up the mountain ridge to see what was happening. From a smooth slope at the foot of the mountain a khaki-uniformed gang, part of a "punitive force", were crawling up. Two or three white-clad Koreans were running up the mountainside towards him.

"Those running are Koreans, no doubt. Maybe they belong to the Independence Army here."

However, Han Hung Su hesitated for a moment or two. With his slightly high forehead he drew in his chin to look down. There must be no delay.

"Let's shoot them, Comrade Choe!"

Han Hung Su pulled out his pistol, jumped off the rock and ran down, Choe Chil Song following close on his heels. Choe was carrying Pak Hung Dok's 38-rifle and felt elated to

have the chance to fire a few live bullets. His heart was beating violently, while Han Hung Su, who was crouched in a crevice, looking down and ahead, pistol in hand, asked Choe Chil Song to come closer.

Blissfully unaware, the policemen came crawling up the narrow ravine where Han Hung Su lay in ambush. There were only a dozen or so in the advance party. He fired at some 30 metres from the corner where the lane curved along the rock. He hit one of them first time, and another at the fourth or fifth shot. Choe Chil Song aimed his rifle, supported on the branch of a tree. He pulled the trigger but no bullet came. He couldn't imagine what had happened. Han Hung Su told him to pull the lock and load the bullets. He had been so absorbed in taking aim that he had pulled the trigger without loading. He looked in front with his loaded gun, but the enemy was already scattering and escaping down the ravine. Somewhat late he fired and fired.

After the police had fled, Han and Choe again went up the mountain ridge to look for the men who had been pursued. They found three men with dark faces squatting on their haunches by a rock. They were spellbound to see the khaki uniforms and caps with the red stars. They had never seen an army like this before. One thing they knew, they had been saved by these soldiers, so they rushed down and made very deep bows, their heads almost touching the ground. One was Om Chi Hwan, the other Li Dong Su. Their short trousers were bloodstained and torn. A third man lay beside the rock, twisting and moaning. Han Hung Su and Choe Chil Song rushed over to him and gave him first aid. Choe Chil Song made a bandage out of his undershirt and dressed the wound. The artery had been cut and his thigh was bleeding profusely, and only stopped when a tourniquet, a twisted piece of cloth with a stick in it, was applied.

There was no stretcher, so Choe Chil Song took the wounded man on his back and hurried down the mountainside, supported on either side by Om Chi Hwan and Li Dong Su.

"Who on earth are you, sirs?"

Om Chi Hwan who had been silent for five *ri*, asked Han Hung Su in a trembling voice.

"We? We are from the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army."

"What? The Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army?"

"Perhaps that sounds strange to you."

Han Hung Su explained briefly what the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army was and asked Choe Chil Song to put down the wounded man who had lost consciousness from loss of blood. Then Han Hung Su took over. They walked so fast that in an hour they had covered some 20 *ri*.

Independence Army soldiers were billeted in a floor-heated room, three times bigger than the average, carpeted with straw mats. The wounded man was laid in a corner of the room for further treatment.

Li Dong Su told his friends about the incident while Om Chi Hwan went off to see Staff Officer Choe.

By the time Chu Ho Rim and his lieutenants had hurried to the barracks of Platoon Three, the wounded man was comfortable and in clean clothes. Independence Army soldiers bustled in and out, carrying medicine and gruel for the patient. A lanky soldier of the Independence Army who brought the medicine in said with a sigh, "It's the war funds that kill men." Staff Officer Choe who was sitting on the far side of the room gave him a sharp look. The frightened soldier put the medicine down and hurried off. There had been similar cases last year and this was the second one this year.

Many guerrillas kept coming to visit the wounded man.

When, for one moment, there was no outsider present, Advisor Hwang asked in a low voice.

"What did you do with the thing you were carrying?"

"We were in such a hurry that we pushed it into a crevice. We'll have to go back for it," Li Dong Su replied.

"You think it'll still be there?"

"Mr. Hwang!" Staff Officer Choe shouted, cutting him short.

Om Chi Hwan who had been watching the wounded man, called out.

"Cheer up, Sang Su! You must live, and we three will go to General Kum Song and thank him, Sang Su."

With a grave face Chu Ho Rim heard Om Chi Hwan's tearful cries and felt the troubled atmosphere in and outside the room. He sat silently, smoking one cigarette after another. Now, his heart was in a whirl. He felt everything shaking him mercilessly and the ground sinking under his feet. During the

last ten years or so since he had joined in the independence movement, he had witnessed many a tragedy befalling his brethren and he himself had experienced countless crises. Despite all the grim ordeals, however, he had had the firm conviction that the day of victory would come if he rallied the people and they fought resolutely against the Japs. But, now, here at this place, he saw all his beliefs crumbling irretrievably, because one soldier was wounded, in itself not at all unusual. Yet, he could not tell exactly why he had this feeling of frustration. The wounded man's groans, the brazen face of Advisor Hwang greedy for money, the behaviour of Staff Officer Choe who could not cover up his self-contempt, or Om Chi Hwan's tearful cries to the injured man—it was, after all, fairly normal. Why did it jar upon his nerves so, then? Why did the guerrillas contrast so sharply with his soldiers? He had not uttered a word, and did not go home till dusk, his shaky feet carrying him with some effort.

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"Why, that's a good idea," Old Tokgo nodded to Om Chi Hwan.

Om Chi Hwan had told the old man's son, Gwan Uk, that he envied the guerrillas and that there were many in his company who would like to join them. His cheeks a trifle withered, Old Tokgo stalked round the yard, his pipe between his teeth.

"I'll see Staff Officer Choe and make a request for you."

"Do you think he'd approve?"

"If he doesn't, you two can desert and join the guerrilla army. Even a king can renounce the throne if he doesn't like it, so you can do as you like. You don't get a government salary or owe anything to the Independence Army, do you?"

"I feel unsettled, you know. I don't know why, but I just don't want to stay on in the army, particularly after that incident."

"Do what I suggested."

Om Chi Hwan cast an embarrassed look at Gwan Uk.

"You'll be in the same mess as you are in now with the Independence Army. You always scurry about to get war funds

and get killed or have your legs broken. Are you ever going to fight for real? Outside shows inside, as the saying goes, and this applies to them guerrillas. They are smart and polite; they are also diligent, and on top of that, as you said, they are brave and fight well. They are real Koreans. You fellows are good-for-nothings. Dull and half-hearted though you have sturdy limbs."

Old Tokgo kept laying out his grievances against the Independence Army to Om Chi Hwan. Then he said he would go and meet General Kum Song and offer his greetings and, taking this opportunity, would ask him to admit them to the guerrilla army. They would be able to quit the Independence Army but the question was whether the guerrillas would accept them. The old man went into the room, took the faded cotton *turumagi* out of the closet and put it on. With a lively step, he walked along the hill path to the back village. He was still energetic enough to serve in the army as efficiently as any veteran soldier.

As luck would have it, three guerrillas were weeding a maize field by the roadside. Om Chi Hwan told him that Choe Chil Song who had saved him was there among the guerrillas, when Old Tokgo wanted to offer him his thanks. With the edges of his *turumagi* fluttering, he walked right into the field and approached a man who was weeding close to the edge, and bowed.

"I'm sorry I'm so late in coming to thank you. Our boys say you guerrillas saved our soldiers from death...."

Old Tokgo firmly believed that this man with the glittering eyes and jovial face was the guerrilla whose name was Choe. As this aged stranger abruptly expressed his gratitude to him, Comrade Kum Song put his hoe aside and returned his bow.

"Oh, it was nothing. Your undeserved appreciation rather embarrasses us."

Smiling, he went to the edge of the field, taking Old Tokgo's hand. Om Chi Hwan whispered from behind that this was not Choe Chil Song, that Choe was the third man, but the old man was too elated to hear him. As the Comrade Commander started talking, Choe Chil Song and another guerrilla stood a little way off in silence.

Sitting down on the grassy slope, Comrade Kum Song offered Old Tokgo a cigarette and held out a match.

"You guerrillas seem to be farmers just like us," the old man said, puffing at his cigarette.

"Yes, we have many peasants as well as workers."

Comrade Kum Song looked at the large green maize leaves glittering in the evening sun, trying to read what this old man had on his mind.

"That's good. My villagers are feeling as happy as at a festival. After spending a few days with you guerrillas, they say Korean independence is not far off now. They are terribly excited. So I am on my way to see General Kum Song."

After a pause he resumed.

"Allow me to ask you a question. Is it true that General Kum Song is in the village now? Some people say that he dropped in here briefly the other day and left for somewhere on urgent business...."

Finding himself placed in an awkward position Comrade Kum Song nodded with a grin, and asked him what he wanted.

"Hey, boys, come here and sit down. Let's consult this gentleman."

"What can I do for you?"

"I want to meet General Kum Song and ask him what people like me can do now to win independence for Korea."

The old man told him that he had taken part in the independence movement for nearly ten years but that recently he had retired, was working in his kitchen garden and was becoming a good-for-nothing.

"Is there anything else on your mind?"

"Nothing special, but I have a second son, who is serving in an Independence Army unit here. I'm going to ask you to allow him to join the guerrilla army."

"The guerrilla army?"

"Yes. By the way, that fellow there is Om Chi Hwan. I know him very well. He is to be trusted. I would like both of them to be accepted by you."

Comrade Kum Song raised his head and gazed at the distant mountains which were turning a deep shade of blue. After some moments, he said.

"Sir, let us suppose a burglar broke into a house with a loaded pistol. What should we do?"

"We should knock him down at all costs."

"But suppose some members of the family wanted to escape through the back door."

"That would be wrong. The burglar can only be knocked down if the whole family resist him."

"You are right. As you said those Independence Army soldiers were pursued by the Japanese who were shooting at them. How could they escape death?"

"Well, because the guerrillas saved them."

He turned round to Om Chi Hwan to confirm that he was right. The young man swallowed and nodded in agreement.

"You are right. They were beaten back because the guerrillas and the Independence Army fought together. That is the thing. If one single man stops fighting, it will be a loss to national liberation." Beginning with this figurative way of speaking, Comrade Kum Song thoroughly convinced the old man that it was a great mistake for him to break away from the independence movement.

"So I've committed a sort of crime, haven't I?"

"You could say that. But it isn't too late."

"Ah!"

Old Tokgo clutched at his chest with shaking hands. So far he had shifted all the blames onto others and remained a spectator in the independence movement. This was the thought that haunted him.

"You mean it's not too late?" he inquired, breathing hard.

"No, it isn't. Sons, fathers and grandsons must fight. To be honest, we cannot meet your request and accept your son for the guerrilla units. As I've just told you, we want the Independence Army and every other force opposed to Japanese imperialism to grow stronger, not collapse. We are going to join together, pool strength with the Independence Army and smash Japanese imperialism. The whole family must jump at the burglar and knock him out. Am I right?"

"You are right."

Old Tokgo sat motionless, his head lowered. After a while he raised his face.

"I thank you. I fully understand what you mean. We almost committed a great blunder. That is my fault. What a blunder I have made by being indifferent towards the independence movement."

The old man rose to his feet, patted the collar of his *turumagi* and bowed gravely.

"Thank you. When I meet the General later, I'll have to apologize from the bottom of my heart."

Comrade Kum Song accompanied the old man as far as the road, holding his hand in his.

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The spacious meeting hall was packed with guerrillas and Independence Army soldiers.

Yong Suk stood gasping on the platform, her face as red as a turkey cock. She was uncertain, not sure which song to sing, *Avenge the Punitive Expedition* or the *Revolutionary Song*. Hye Yong who had pushed her to make her go up to the platform, looked irritated, blinking her eyes and biting her finger tip. Pak Hung Dok was in the corner, smiling and nodding to her to show what she could do. There was another burst of applause. Yong Suk took a deep breath and began to sing.

*Mother, mother, why do you cry?
If you cry, I too want to cry....*

The audience was silent. The clear singing voice rang desolately across the room. As she sang Yong Suk's voice seemed on the verge of weeping, but her voice flowed on and on. Pressing both her hands softly against her throbbing breast, the girl ran her tear-filled eyes over the audience as if she had just met with a great tragedy.

On the right where soldiers of the Independence Army sat huddled together, some one gave a great sigh of grief. The song grew sadder and sadder, rending the hearts of the listeners and making them think of their miseries, of their unhappy past. In their mind's eye they saw the burning villages, the images of beloved kinsfolk now dead, of their comrades shot by the Japanese, who called for vengeance.

Wrapped in sadness, Yong Suk sang the second and the third stanzas and finished *Avenge the Punitive Expedition*. The singer's figure, her oval face and double eyelids reminded the soldiers of their younger sisters who suffered many sorrows and misfortunes. Guerrillas and Independence Army soldiers alike remembered their sisters waving to them at the edge of their village when they left home. As her song came to a finish,

she raised her long, wet eyelashes and looked at the audience. At this moment Om Chi Hwan clutched at his chest with both hands as if something sharp had cut into his heart. Though the singing was over, the people did not stir, their heads dropped. Only after a few moments, did they come to their senses and begin to clap.

"Oh, I feel sad all through!"

"She is a wonderful singer."

The soldiers of the Independence Army huddled together.

"If you cry, I too want to cry. It tore at my heart!"

Then Chon Gwang Sik came out on the stage. Of solid and stocky build, at first glance he looked like any young peasant. He walked with his head slightly bowed and stood in salute. He had to dispel the heavy mood caused by the sad, desolate song and create a vibrating and pulsating air. He raised his arms and led them all in the *Revolutionary Song*. As he conducted with dexterity, all the guerrillas moved their fists in time to the tune. The roaring chorus powerfully shook the air.

*You are bleeding us white
But your greedy voices will be choked.*

At this passage the song became more furious. The guerrillas clenched their fists and wielded them more vigorously. Their eyes flamed with hatred. The chorus shook the meeting hall. Chon Gwang Sik kept time, vigorously swinging his both arms. However, none of the Independence Army soldiers could sing. Again they felt that the guerrillas were a race apart. It was now obvious to them that they were way behind the guerrillas not just in marching but in singing too.

A couple of days ago, here in this meeting hall Advisor Hwang had talked pompously about the three principles of obedience for the women, while in the guerrilla army the women carried guns, fought battles like the men, and sang.

Now, on Chon Gwang Sik's proposal, the guerrillas were going to sing with the Independence Army. *Arirang* was chosen for the purpose. Any song would do; once they joined voices, their minds and purposes would be one. Chon Gwang Sik controlled the atmosphere with skill; while letting the guerrillas demonstrate their revolutionary spirit, he took care that they should not appear smug, and to convince the rest of the audience

that the guerrillas were modest and friendly. He saw to it that the two sides sent up singers in turn. He did all he could to encourage and invigorate the soldiers of the Independence Army.

He raised his hands and sang the first verse of *Arirang*. Then the whole of the audience joined him in unison.

Arirang, Arirang, Arariyo....

Chon Gwang Sik conducted slowly. A sorrowful air filled the room. It was not a mere chorus of *Arirang*. It was a lament for their ruined country; it was a vow to devote their all to fighting for their country. The guerrillas and the Independence Army soldiers sang at the top of their voices, claspng shoulders or grasping each other's hands. Among others Choe Chil Song, who was flanked by Om Chi Hwan and Li Dong Su, was conspicuous. They locked arms and swayed their shoulders together.

After the entertainment Staff Officer Choe appeared and said that there would be a "gathering to welcome the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army under General Kum Song's command". He made a short speech before declaring the meeting open. On the platform Han Hung Su sat in the centre flanked by Staff Officer Choe and Advisor Hwang. The visitors' seats on the right were occupied by a dozen or so elderly villagers. Among them was Pi Sang Su's mother with a white hood on, who had hurried here from her village a hundred *ri* away. The gathering had been sponsored by a few youths who had worked under Comrade Kum Song's guidance while he was active at Wangchingmen, Hsingching. Advisor Hwang had tried hard to prevent it but had been forced to appear on the platform because of what happened to Pi Sang Su.

After the formalities, Om Chi Hwan took the floor. First he expressed his gratitude to the guerrillas for visiting his unit of the Independence Army from across Mt. Paekdu-san. Tall, with big eyes, the speaker was not at all fluent but his surging emotion enabled him to show what was in his mind.

"Your visit here is like food to the hungry or rain during drought. It has been a great eye-opener for us, and I thank you. Were it not for the guerrillas, I would have been in my grave like O Yang Chon who was killed last month. That is true of Li Dong Su sitting over there, not to mention Pi Sang Su. The guerrillas saved us from death, and then ran 20 *ri* with

Pi Sang Su on their backs. They fed him with gruel and washed his bloodstained clothes....”

The breath choked in Om Chi Hwan’s throat and he struck his chest with his fist. Unable to express his burning emotion, he gazed at the audience with reddened eyes, bowed two or three times to thank them and descended from the rostrum.

The next speaker was Choe Chil Song. Stout, well-built and of medium height, he stood to attention on the rostrum. It was the first time he had appeared before so big an audience. What was more, he had never dreamt of speaking about himself. His heart beat wildly; he felt as though his throat would burst; his temples were pulsating. However, he pulled himself together and began.

“Before joining the guerrillas, I worked for a landlord as a servant for ten years. He would curse me and beat me every other day. He struck me on the scalp with his stick or pulled my ears because he said my bundles of firewood were small. I did not know then how to live like a man, and just worked as hard as I could, bobbing my head to the master. When I heard one day that the guerrilla army had been formed, I left home. The guerrilla army showed me the path to take. When he found I could not read or write, General Kum Song made notebooks for me and helped me write ABC, guiding my hand himself. I still can’t read or write very well. But soon I shall be able to use my eyes to read books and to use my hands to write letters.

“I’m also learning how to shoot. I’m not skilled yet. However, I feel sure I will be able to send bullets into the chests of the Japs, our enemies. I’ll fight, with the gun the General gave me, until all the Japs are forced to leave our land. I’ll fight to the last drop of blood.

“Now, my friends, elder brothers and younger brothers in the Independence Army, let’s pool our efforts. If we the guerrillas and you the Independence Army join hands, we’ll grow in stature, won’t we? The other day Mr. Om Chi Hwan and his friends were chased by the Japs. If we had had a few more men on our side, we could have wiped out that whole group of Japanese police—there weren’t so many. But, to our regret, we only managed to get two of them. Those who fled were frightened but they will come back and attack us again, won’t they? The enemies must be wiped out to a man.”

Blinking his dark eyes, Choe Chil Song gazed round the room or stared at his toes.

There was a stir among the Independence Army soldiers.

"So he was a servant, eh?"

"I thought most of the guerrillas were educated."

"Let's hear him."

Meanwhile, Pak Hung Dok, seated in the front row, kept nodding his head and murmuring to himself.

"You are doing a good job, servant. Go on, go on. Fine. That's it."

Choe Chil Song raised his head to look in front. He saw all the eyes like twinkling stars in the night sky focussed on him.

He called out at the top of his voice.

"We are all brothers, are we not? Let us join hands like this."

Choe Chil Song flushed as he raised his hands and clasped them together, made a bow and then hurried back into the crowd. They were as animated as ever. The guerrillas broke into another song.

Get ready, comrades, with arms in hands.

Let's smash the imperialist aggressors....

Quite a few soldiers of the Independence Army knew this song, and joined in.

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Chu Ho Rim was sitting in a pensive mood, leaning against the bamboo blind door of the corner room. He was at a loss what to do. Two Chu Ho Rims were still fighting a bloody fight. One was demanding unconditional unity of action with the guerrillas; the other opposing it. Raising his head, muddled for want of sleep, his blank eyes wandered out of the window, but wherever they rested, the images of Staff Officer Choe and Advisor Hwang—the former's shrewd face or the latter's heavy jowls—would appear one after the other. To dispel the nightmarish images, he smoked cigarette after cigarette, making rumbling sounds and moaning.

At that moment General Kum Song entered through the

front gate. The host hurried into the yard to meet him. Comrade Kum Song wished to see Chu Ho Rim for the last time before leaving. He had nothing special to talk over with him; he would inform him of his imminent departure and of the latest foreign and domestic developments. He would also warn that there had been some moves within the ranks of the Independence Army which could lead to a split. This speculation of his was by no means unfounded.

From the moment Comrade Kum Song sat down until he finished talking, Chu Ho Rim listened in silence, shifting his position from time to time, unable to get over his uneasiness. He tried hard to appear undisturbed by smoking cigarettes. General Kum Song was kind enough to come and visit him again, who was of so little importance. But, though the guest had come from far away, he had not received him with open heart and good cheer until the eve of his departure. Chu deeply regretted his behaviour. He had received the guest this way not through any whim or for any particular reason. That was why he felt so miserable and anxious. Advisor Hwang had visited him at home day and night to keep him informed of the guerrillas' moves. At first, he was not sure what decision Chu would take; so he had been vague, dropping hints such as "we cannot join hands with the Communists" or "the guerrillas came here to swallow us up." However, now that he saw the decisive moment had arrived, Hwang stuck tenaciously to his claim. He said he had received information that Om Chi Hwan was agitating, trying to persuade one company to mutiny. He warned that if this situation continued and negotiations with the guerrillas went ahead, he too would have to split the force and break away. Moreover, though he did not betray himself, he hinted darkly that if things went on like this, something terrible might happen.

However, Chu Ho Rim was not to be budged. He could not be hostile towards the guerrillas.

After a while Chu Ho Rim smiled gently and then spoke in a firm voice.

"Thank you very much for coming to see me, General. Your visit has meant a lot to me. I have learned much and thought a great deal. As for your proposal for a united front, I will give it further consideration and study specific means." He paused for a moment and, casting a melancholy glance out of doors, continued.

"To tell you the truth, there are many things I don't know. When the right opportunity crops up, I'll pay you a visit, General."

"That's up to you, Mr. Chu. I didn't come here expecting a definite commitment from you right away. Our only wish is that the salvation of our homeland now bathed in a sea of blood shall not be put off through prejudice or misunderstanding. You know better than anyone else that even an hour's delay or hesitation on our part will cause our people further untold suffering. We, for our part, have done all in our power so that we have no regrets in the future. I sincerely hope that the Independence Army under your command will grow in number and strength to become a great force capable of chasing the Japanese imperialist aggressors off our territory. Do you feel ill?"

"Oh, not at all." Chu Ho Rim's voice shook slightly.

A little later, Chu Ho Rim went with him to attend the meeting to welcome the guerrillas.

As Comrade Kum Song appeared on the platform followed by Chu Ho Rim, everybody rose to their feet. Then someone among the Independence Army soldiers gathered in the middle of the hall shouted, "That's General Kum Song!"

Some young men who had attended the Meeting of the General Federation of Youth in South Manchuria had recognized him.

"That's General Kum Song."

"Yes, it is."

Raising both hands, Om Chi Hwan shouted, "Long live General Kum Song!"

The whole audience shouted with joy. Everyone shouted hurrah, and clapped.

As the noise subsided, Old Tokgo made his way towards the platform. In the light of the kerosene lamps hanging over the centre of the hall and on the platform, the old man in his white *turumagi* stood out in bold relief. It had never occurred to him that the man he had talked to on the slope near the maize field could be the General himself.

"General!"

As he stood across from General Kum Song, he grabbed him by the hand.

"General! Excuse me. I just didn't recognize you."

Comrade Kum Song recognized the old man.

"Excuse me. I should have visited you first and offered my greetings."

Firmly holding the General's hand in his, Old Tokgo was carried away by sheer joy. He was followed by Pi Sang Su's mother. Her hood covered her ears as is the custom with most women in Pyongan Province. She was supported by Choe Chil Song. Tears welled up in her eyes before speaking to the General. Her wrinkled cheeks quivering, she had something on the tip of her tongue but could not open her lips to say it.

Comrade Kum Song held the mother's hand and greeted her first, bowing slightly.

"Mother, Sang Su will recover soon. He will stand up and vent his wrath on the Japs. And in a world without Japs he will live with you, remembering bygone days."

Wiping her tears several times with her sleeve, she spoke at last.

"Thank you, General. You saved my son. How can I ever repay you?"

"There is nothing for you to repay. We did what we are supposed to do."

All of a sudden he thought of his own ailing mother at Hsiaoshaho. Before his eyes flashed the face of his mother who had insisted that she had not been ill, hiding the towel she had had round her head under the mat. He was holding now a hand much like his mother's that had sewn buttons on his tunic.

"Mother!" His voice shook somewhat.

"Let's go and see Sang Su."

When the meeting was over, Comrade Kum Song followed her to the back village. Pi Sang Su, who was lying under the oil lamp, lifted his white face. Comrade Kum Song sat on the right, holding the wounded man's hand in his, and placing his other hand on his brow. The pulse was quick and the temperature high.

"How did you treat the wound?" he asked Han Hung Su.

"We put a piece of willow bark on it. He's got a broken bone but it isn't fractured."

"Fine. It's swelling right now. You had better raise his heel a bit."

Pi Sang Su had recovered consciousness within two days. He opened his eyes and looked up but he could not identify the visitor.

"Son, he is General Kum Song who saved your life," said his mother softly, gazing down at her son's face.

"What?!"

Pi Sang Su raised his head and tried to support himself on his elbow.

"Lie still. Don't move."

Still touching his forehead with his hand, Comrade Kum Song patted his shoulder and smoothed the edge of the quilt.

"General!" Pi Sang Su barely managed to whisper, moving his parched lips. He was feverish. His chest was heaving.

"Have you eaten anything?"

"Yes, General. I ate the thin gruel Brother Chil Song prepared." His lips were trembling; he was at a loss for words.

"They washed and fixed my bloodstained clothes so neatly." He showed them the clothes Yong Suk and her friends had washed and ironed.

"You'll get better soon. Get better and put on your clothes and fight."

"General, do you think I shall be able to fight again?"

"Why not? Just lie still and accept the treatment. I'm sure you'll be all right."

"General!" Pi Sang Su grasped the General's hand and then averted his face. The tears which had welled up trickled down his cheeks on to the pillow. His mother was deeply touched too and turned round to wipe away her tears.

Chu Ho Rim had not uttered a word between the welcome gathering and his parting with Comrade Kum Song after his visit on Pi Sang Su. He had remained seated with an impassive face and then exchanged words of parting before going home.

Back at his command post, Comrade Kum Song walked round the yard now bathed in moonlight, analysing every detail of the work done in the Tunghua area.

Men had been dispatched to Huanjen, Hsingching and Chingyuan, and messengers had come in from those places. Many problems had been solved on forming guerrilla units in the Amnok-gang River area. Contact had been made successfully with units of the National Salvation Army stationed at Mengchiang. As a result of political activities throughout this vast area, the inhabitants had made the acquaintance of the guerrilla army.

Now the guerrillas must go to Liuho. Comrade O Sang Gwon was there. When political workers had been sent out to many places immediately before and after the Chialun Meeting, he had volunteered for this place because it was his home. He had been a member of the Young Communist League in those days at Kirin. For some time Comrade Kum Song had received messages from him informing that things were going well there, but since he had moved to Antu, there had been no further news.

Pacing up and down the yard with Han Hung Su, Comrade Kum Song said that the guerrillas must leave no later than tomorrow and that Chon Gwang Sik should stay behind for a few days to see how the people here had reacted to their visit and settle some affairs after their departure.

Han Hung Su made a mental note of what he said, and reported what he had found out that day.

"Comrade Commander, I've been informed that Advisor Hwang's attitude is still negative," said Han Hung Su in a lowered voice, with his back to the wattle fence on which bean vines were creeping up.

"How about Staff Officer Choe?" he inquired with a grin.

"He is very active. He prefers a merger, rather than talk about negotiations or cooperation."

"He is going a little too far."

"How about Chu Ho Rim? Remains unchanged?"

"Why not? He said he would visit us some day."

Turning round to look at Han Hung Su, he continued.

"Comrade Han, the nationalist movement is in its last throes. It is breaking up rapidly in three directions...."

Han Hung Su was alerted to these significant words, but the Comrade Commander did not add anything, merely saying, "Let's go on to Liuho."

Darkness fell, and insects whispered incessantly on the stone fence at a corner of the yard. A moon of thirteen days rolled fast through the clouds.

The unit arrived at the mountainside from where a good view could be had of the streets of Liuho. It was a summer day and they should be able to make another 50 *ri* before sunset. However, the Comrade Commander ordered that they pitch camp here.

Han Hung Su reproached himself for being so sceptical and clicked his tongue. He realized now that on leaving Tung-hua, indeed, ever since they had decided on this march at Liang-kiang, the Comrade Commander had intended to skirt Mt. Hsinglungshan. The unit was supposed to go from Tunghua due north to Liuho and make a turn right at Liuho to Liang-kiang through Mengchiang. When the route was first announced, many members of the unit had had no doubts; they regarded it as natural since it had been explained at the outset that the aim was to demonstrate the power of the newly formed Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army, to sow the seeds of revolution among the broad masses of people and to temper and reinforce the army on the way. Liuho was a place where many Koreans lived, an area where the independence movement had been active. Since they were going through the area, it was natural they should stop for a while there.

Besides, on receiving the Comrade Commander's instructions, Han Hung Su remembered O Sang Gwon, that his home village, Toksan Valley was in Liuho. The Comrade Commander had not said a word, but it was obvious that he was very anxious to have news of O Sang Gwon.

If Han Hung Su had taken steps on the march, he could have led the unit straight towards Toksan by now. Han Hung Su thought of how passive he had been and felt embarrassed on seeing the Comrade Commander. But since nothing had been heard from Toksan Valley for months, it was impossible to take the Comrade Commander there without knowing the situation in advance.

Han felt irritated; he glanced up at the sun, gauging how

high it was above the horizon. He called Chon Gwang Sik who had just returned from Tunghua where he had been working for the past few days. He asked him to take his place, and ran back towards the command post at the rear. At that moment the Comrade Commander, accompanied by two orderlies, was approaching the mountainside where the unit had made a halt. When Han Hung Su hurried up to him and saluted, he asked:

"How are things going? Do you think you have a good spot here for pitching camp?"

"The local population seem all right. There are just a few 'Self-Defence Corps' members, and there is no conspicuous enemy movement. But we are near the roadside. I thought it would be better to move some 10 *ri* into the mountains. So I asked Chon Gwang Sik to send out a couple of men to look for a good place."

"Fine. I had the same idea. Then we'll have time before we make camp..."

He, too, looked at the sun and then at Han Hung Su's face. Han Hung Su instantly read his mind.

"We have time, Comrade Commander. So I would like to go and see Comrade O Sang Gwon."

"You?..." He asked quietly, and then reflected for a moment or two, his hands clasped behind his back.

"You intend to go there by yourself, Comrade Han?..."

The even tone of his voice again reminded Han Hung Su that he had not been attentive enough. The Comrade Commander regarded it as quite natural for him to go to Liuho. Since he was in this area now with his troops, it was certain that he would call there. As political activities had been intensified among the people in town and country after the fight to stop the Japanese building the Kirin-Hoeryong railway, O Sang Gwon, true to the Comrade Commander's intentions, had left for Liuho on his own initiative. The Comrade Commander always had him in mind because of the nature of the work he had been doing and of their comradeship formed ever since his Kirin days. He was a close friend of Han Hung Su's, too, had known him since his revolutionary awakening, had shared his joys and sorrows and fought on the same barricade. There were several other close friends of O Sang Gwon's in the unit. So when the march moved towards Liuho, he should have anticipated the Comrade Commander's intentions right away,

and should have been reporting to him by now the news from Toksan Valley.

While Han Hung Su, head lowered, stood wrapped in thought, the Comrade Commander said in a ringing voice.

"Let's do this. Take a couple of men and go and see Comrade O Sang Gwon first. You'd better draw up a plan of action for the unit to help him in his work. It's a remote spot as you know and if a large armed force were to appear there suddenly, it well might alarm the inhabitants...."

Han Hung Su set off quickly, walking at a sharp pace right from the start, accompanied by Chin Il Man, who knew Sang Gwon well from the Kirin days, and an orderly. Chin Il Man was happily excited already, because O Sang Gwon and he had been inseparable. Like Chin, O Sang Gwon would carry books under his arm and know how to put on airs when talking. He was more passionate than Chin Il Man. So they had often argued with each other though they were close friends.

"When he first heard the line set out by the Chialun Meeting he wept for joy, didn't he?"

Han Hung Su walked so fast that Chin Il Man kept dropping behind a step or two, but every time a new idea occurred to him, he would catch up with his company commander and ask him questions.

"Comrade O Sang Gwon was not the only man who wept." Han Hung Su was nervous and answered rather abruptly.

"Everybody was happy. I was at Tunhua at the time, and people who had been working underground told me that they felt as if their eyes had been opened. Comrade Company Commander, it's more than half a year now since we heard from him last, isn't it?"

"I think it is. Comrade Pak Ung Chon was arrested on his way back from a liaison mission last winter. So...."

"The Comrade Commander seems very anxious about him. One day I stood sentry at headquarters. He was in a pensive mood far into the night without a wink of sleep. Then he came out and asked me about O Sang Gwon's family."

"When was that?" Han Hung Su asked, making a sudden halt.

Unable to understand why he had started in surprise, Chin Il Man tried to remember, and stared at him vacantly.

"If Comrade Pak Ung Chon was killed last winter, then maybe it was this spring. We were at Liangkiang at that time."

"Why do you tell me that now?" Han Hung Su blurted out with a rather disagreeable expression and resumed his hurried walk.

"Well, that's...."

Chin Il Man tried to explain but since Han Hung Su was far ahead of him by now, he set his lips in a stern line and walked faster to catch up with him.

Towards dusk Han Hung Su's party had reached the hill behind Toksan Valley. They dropped in at a lone peasant house at the foot of the mountain and found out that apart from a single platoon of Japanese and some police stationed 10 *ri* away, there was no sign of the enemy in the village. They climbed to the top of the hill covered with bush clovers in full bloom, from where they could see a hamlet of some 300 houses nestled cozily in a punch bowl formed by two small hillocks.

"Hum—that's the poplar...." Spotting a solitary poplar towering high on the edge of the left hillock, Han Hung Su shouted in a cheerful voice for the first time that day and ran down towards the tree.

"Comrade Chin, let's go over there. There must be a spring under that poplar."

O Sang Gwon loved his village in Toksan Valley, and he had described every detail of it to his friends as vividly as if drawing a scroll picture. Sometimes he would give an eloquent flourish of rhetoric even when describing the mill or a mountain lane which no one else would dream of boasting about. He probably volunteered for this assignment here in the teeth of the enemy's tight cordon because of his deep affection for the village and its people.

O Sang Gwon had every reason to be proud of this poplar; it was so luxuriant, beautiful and majestic, with something fateful about it. The countless leaves which had grown so lavishly in the mid-summer sun had a lacquer sheen to them as they reflected the evening glow.

Han Hung Su and Chin Il Man felt their hearts full after looking down at the hamlet, and hugging the stocky trunk of the poplar tree which they had pictured to themselves but never seen. They ran down the steep hill like children. They kept on running, picking wild flowers on either side of the mountain path and raising dust on the slope of the yellow earth until they arrived at a bend of the hill densely covered with purple eulalias. There they came across a spring that was

tranquility itself, sinking deep in the earth. The water bubbled up incessantly and flowed quietly down. The two men halted all of a sudden.

"How crystal-clear the water is!..." The orderly who had followed them up gave a delighted cry, mopping the sweat off his shining forehead.

At the bottom of the cliff a few slender turt roots were protruding and the green leaves peeping out of the surface of the spring. A poplar leaf drawn into an eddy whirled round and round and drifted down the stream dancing in and out of the purple eulalia bushes. They took a deep drink of the water in turns, balancing on two big stepping stones rarely to be found on this sort of earthy mountainside. They pushed back their caps, put their mouths to the water, dipping in their noses and then laughed merrily, looking up at the sky.

The entrance to the village was deserted. A couple of people could be seen in the distance, coming home from the field. Han Hung Su deliberately slowed down as he passed a few of the houses. He stopped by the yard of one house where a young man with thick bushy hair was unloading an A-frame carrier.

"Excuse me."

Without pausing for a moment, Han Hung Su called to the young man in an intentionally loud voice, looking intently at his rather stubborn face.

"Who are you?" inquired the youth slowly, after giving a long incredulous look at the three men in their strange dress. "Travellers," replied Han Hung Su, evading the point, for he had no desire to reveal his identity while standing on the roadside.

"Mr. O Pil Su lives in this village, doesn't he?"

O Pil Su was O Sang Gwon's father. The young man looked amazed.

"Mr. O Pil Su? Yes, he does. Where are you from?"

"We have come to the right place," said Han Hung Su with a sigh of satisfaction and turned to Chin Il Man, wiping the sweat off his brow.

"Which house is his?" asked Chin Il Man hastily.

"This is his house. But..."

"Is it?" asked Han Hung Su and Chin Il Man in chorus. And they both took a step forward.

"Then, is Comrade O Sang Gwon in? I mean his son who studied at Kirin."

As Chin Il Man fired question after question impatiently, the young man looked blankly at the two men, first at one, then at the other. He had a very sad face.

Han Hung Su felt uneasy for some reason.

"We're close friends of Comrade O Sang Gwon's...."

Carefully watching the youth Han Hung Su still evaded a direct answer to his repeated question as to where they were from. However, the young man seemed to have lost interest and turned away.

Then he said softly in a subdued voice.

"My brother isn't here."

"Your brother? Then you are Dok Gwon? Where is your brother? I used to work with your brother. Where is he?"

As if trying to dispel the ominous presentiment weighing down his heart, Han Hung Su grabbed the youth who kept his head lowered and shook him by the shoulder.

"I guessed you were his friends. You are the guerrillas, aren't you? We've heard that the guerrillas are in the neighbourhood. But my brother isn't here." Dok Gwon said, casting his tearful eyes on Han Hung Su who still held his shoulder.

"What happened to him? Tell us, young man," Chin Il Man prodded him, as if he could not stand any more.

"My brother is dead."

"What?!" Han Hung Su's hands dropped helplessly from his shoulder. O Sang Gwon is dead.... Is it possible that such a young, energetic revolutionary optimist, pulsating with a burning desire for life?...

"Is it true? Tell us the truth, I say." Chin Il Man cried, closing on him as if to grab him by the throat.

Gazing at the poplar tree on the hillock rustling in the evening breeze, its crown shining in the sunset, Han Hung Su heard Dok Gwon's mumbling voice as if in a dream.

"Last winter.... Yes, it was last winter. His organization was uncovered in the autumn. There were so many spies everywhere and.... My brother was not good at hiding himself. The blackguards kept him in jail, torturing him, for two months and nine days before they finally shot him. There had been a heavy snowfall the night before. My brother was made to walk in the snow in his bare feet. The snow was knee-deep. His clothes were in tatters.... Fortunately it was not so windy that day...."

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"Dying, he shouted, 'Long live General Kum Song!' Because the General has come to this dreadful place to see my son, I must go and visit him myself. That is my duty as a Korean."

Old O Pil Su searched around for his *turumagi*. Since Han Hung Su had sent the orderly to headquarters, he persuaded the old man, with great difficulty, not to go, knowing meanwhile how heartbroken the Comrade Commander would be. It was late and he would spend a wakeful, agonizing night. As soon as day broke he would come here with his troops. Han Hung Su had asked the orderly again and again to break the news gently, to be careful how he worded his report. For all that, he was uneasy. Moreover, faced now with O Sang Gwon's family, Han Hung Su felt so choked he could hardly speak. Neither his father nor mother shed tears, for many months had elapsed since their son's tragic death, and both of them were strong-willed people. Rather, they comforted Han Hung Su who was engulfed by deep grief. However, the old man could not hide the tears that welled up in the corners of his eyes, when he recalled that the villagers would speak of his son as one of the greatest men Toksan Valley had ever produced and as the finest person in the whole Liuho area. Han Hung Su's heart bled still more as he thought of Ok Nyo quietly washing bowls in the kitchen. All the people of this house and almost everything he heard here were familiar to him because O Sang Gwon had told him all about them. The only stranger was the girl, Ok Nyo who had wiped her wet hands on her apron and bowed, showing her hair neatly parted in the middle.

"This is Ok Nyo. My brother...." Dok Gwon faltered, merely hinting that she had been betrothed to his brother. He went on.

"My brother asked her to come to this village to work as teacher at the night school. Then mother was stricken with consumption and she helped her with the housework. And my brother was suddenly arrested. She had supplied him with clothes and food while he was in jail until he was killed. We

told her she should go home but she would not hear of it. Now no one suggests it any more."

The reticent girl's shoulders told a sadder story as she stood there than tens upon thousands of words could have done. She did not express joy or sorrow in words but when she raised her head, her large eyes showed a gleam of pleasure at meeting her dead lover's comrades.

"You are Comrade Han Hung Su, aren't you?" she asked softly, her moist eyes sparkling. He just nodded, too despondent even to wonder how this unknown girl knew his name. However, he realized now that even her simple question which he had heard and answered bluntly meant a lot to her. Ok Nyo was now working in the kitchen in utter silence, but Han Hung Su thought he could read her whole heart.

A cricket chirped under the porch. Through the open window the mysterious tune of the summer night wafted in, carried by a tender breeze. A fire which had been made in a brazier to keep down the mosquitoes had gone out and the blades of grass were drooping, laden with the dew. A reddish sickle moon rose over the eastern hills but everything was wrapped in the veil of darkness.

"Go on in and sleep, girl." O Pil Su who had been smoking absent-mindedly called in the direction of the kitchen. Then he got to his feet and, holding onto the post of the open paper door, peered into the next room.

"I'm sorry you couldn't rest after your long, tiring journey because of our domestic affairs. Dok Gwon, why don't you prepare beds for the guests?"

"Don't worry, father. I would like to spend the night like this here in Sang Gwon's room and look back on bygone days.... Please don't worry about me and shut the door."

"How genuine is he? They say people are less sincere these days, but I don't believe it," muttered the mistress of the house in a corner of the main room, clicking her tongue. She had been suffering from consumption, and since her son's tragic death, from nerves too, so she had been confined to her bed for two weeks every month.

In spite of his father's request, Dok Gwon sat motionless at his brother's desk like a statue, his hand resting on the top. Han Hung Su hung his head and sat in silence, touching a few books standing on the desk and a small frame beside it. Both the desk and the books were thumb-marked by O Sang Gwon. In the

frame was a picture of him as a student at the Fifth Middle School in Kirin, taken at Chiangnan Park a few days after the formation of the Anti-Imperialist Youth League. In the picture Han Hung Su saw himself standing beside his dead comrade. He remembered that on meeting him Ok Nyo had asked him if he was Han Hung Su. It was obvious that after O Sang Gwon had been killed, the people of this house, having lost a son, a brother and a lover, had remembered him in sorrow in front of this picture.

There was the sound of footsteps outside. Han Hung Su slowly raised his head as Chin Il Man who had been on guard in the outer yard came rushing in.

"Comrade Company Commander, the Comrade Commander is coming."

"What?"

Han Hung Su quickly put on his cap and stood up.

"And all the troops?"

"I can't see them. But the Comrade Instructor Chon Gwang Sik and a few others are with him."

Han Hung Su exchanged a few words with Chin Il Man while crossing the yard, and whirled round to tell O Pil Su and Dok Gwon:

"General Kum Song is coming."

"At the dead of night?"

The old man remained standing stupidly for a while as if he had lost his mind, and when he came to he darted into the room.

"Get me my *turumagi*, wife.... And Dok Gwon, bring me a pair of garters."

Comrade Kum Song stopped as soon as he entered the yard. When the heavy footsteps, in which you could almost hear his turbulent emotions, came to a halt, the place was suddenly buried in a hushed silence. He merely nodded as he listened to Chin Il Man's report. Then he looked at the old couple on the porch, who appeared rather flustered. With no time to fasten the strings of his *turumagi* O Pil Su ran to the middle of the yard, almost falling forward. His outstretched arms which seemed to be entreating help were trembling.

"Father!" Comrade Kum Song instantly stepped forward and put his hands on the bony shoulders.

"I've been waiting for you, General. And having once met you, I'd have no regrets if I died right now."

Comrade Kum Song hung his head silently. Night dew was falling stealthily and profusely on his dishevelled hair, and on the already damp shoulders of his tunic.

"Father, I share your deep sorrow in the tragedy that has overcome you in this far-off alien land. The Japanese, our bitter enemies, have taken Sang Gwon from us. But he did not die in vain. He fought heroically for the revolution to his last breath."

His sad voice was not high but it rent the people's hearts. The night dew continued to fall. On the hillock where the poplar swayed, a screech owl hooted dolefully, but no one looked up. On hearing the news of the tragic end of his comrade-in-arms, he had tramped 20 *ri* without a halt, through the dark night. Now he was standing here in the yard, grief-stricken; even the breeze seemed afraid to stir. The night dew came down as if weeping for the broken heart of the General who held back the tears that overflowed in his heart. Ok Nyo, who had been standing in a corner of the yard, suddenly ran into the kitchen, covering her face with hands. Then the old woman tumbled down on the earthen porch and started to wail.

"General, my dear General, if Sang Gwon were still alive... how happy he would be to see you!"

"Mother...." Comrade Kum Song went up to her quietly and helped her to her feet. She wept on her sleeve. Patting her heaving shoulders, Comrade Kum Song took out his handkerchief and wiped her tears.

"Don't be heartbroken. To us, Comrade Sang Gwon is always alive. We'll serve you on his behalf."

Her shoulders heaved more violently and through the tears she cried.

"Heaven bless you, General. You have come to condole with us on the death of our humble son. It is a great honour for me, his mother. General, I wish...I wish you, General, a long, long life."

Ok Nyo's convulsive sobs were heard from the kitchen. Old O Pil Su who was facing the mud wall brought the string of his *turumagi* occasionally to his wet cheeks.

All of a sudden, Han Hung Su saw clearly the beaming face of O Sang Gwon, the young lion of Kirin's Fifth Middle School, over the poplar under the hanging sickle moon. He blinked to try and see it again. Great teardrops trickled down his cheeks, but the hallucination had gone. Only the screech owl hooted, tearing at his heart.

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A road wound along the edge of punch bowl-shaped Toksan Valley. Headquarters was near the bend from where the road ran straight to level ground. The building which housed it had once been a tavern. The thatched roof was rather dilapidated, but the house itself was quite large. Situated on the outskirts of the village, it was a quiet, out-of-the-way place. Guerrilla sentries had been posted at both ends of the village so that no suspicious person could come up the road.

With strained expressions, all the people—those who had conducted political work among the villagers as well as those who were now waiting at the yard in front of headquarters—were watching the room where the Comrade Commander was.

The guerrilla troops had arrived at the village that morning. But they already knew of O Sang Gwon's death and about the situation in the village, and the word had also gone round that the Comrade Commander had called at O Sang Gwon's house at midnight and sat through the night with the bereaved family.

He had returned to the temporary headquarters billet, his face showing both grief and wrath. He started work right away, without stopping to sleep or eat. First he received information about the Toksan area. Dok Gwon, O Sang Gwon's brother, called on him, and the youths who had had connection with the revolutionary organizations had been sent for. Meanwhile, the messengers who had been in the Wangching area via the temporary communications centre at Tunghua arrived at noon. Messengers from other areas had come back while the troops were at Tunghua, and two of them had caught up with the unit on the way to Liuho.

Headquarters was crowded, but not a cough or a footstep could be heard, for all knew that the Comrade Commander was keeping his anger in check. Touching a few books that had belonged to O Sang Gwon, Comrade Kum Song listened to the Toksan village youths; he gave his whole mind to what they told him about O Sang Gwon's work from the time when he arrived here and formed the first revolutionary organi-

zations until he met his tragic end because of a special agent disguised as a *Jintan* vendor. He jotted down the salient points in his notebook. First, a member of the Anti-Imperialist League had been arrested and then its president and the head of the Women's Association, and a month later, the whole organizations which had covered 70 to 80 *ri* around had been destroyed at one fell swoop. His eyes were shut tightly as he listened.

"Let's shore up the organizations. Let's take revenge on them. Send Comrade Chin Il Man in. And look for Comrade Chon Gwang Sik and Kwon Man Song. I think they are at Comrade O Sang Gwon's house."

Then, to Dok Gwon and the two village youths who had been affiliated with the Anti-Imperialist Youth League he said calmly.

"Those blackguards took dear comrades from us. But we must not give way to fear or give up our cause. As you know, the Korean people have a guerrilla army—their own revolutionary armed force. This guerrilla army emerged out of bloody struggle waged by our comrades. Each of the guns carried by our men is soaked in the blood of revolutionary comrades-in-arms. Therefore, whenever we use these guns we say to ourselves that we are mowing down the enemies with our fallen comrades-in-arms. Just think of it, comrades. To whom did Comrade O Sang Gwon dedicate his youth? Had he wanted personal happiness and comfort, he could have found it. But he fought and staked his life, with an ardent wish to free his homeland and to save the Korean people. Comrade O Sang Gwon was killed, the organizations were destroyed and the enemy is resorting frantically to further repressions and this might upset you temporarily. Frankly speaking, you did not know how to defend and strengthen your organizations and could not restore your contact with us, so you have been unable to carry on the work. You may see this as inevitable. But you cannot sit by with your arms folded. You must carry forward Comrade O Sang Gwon's cause. For then he will be alive for ever in our work and by our side."

The three young men were touched by his earnest explanation, and their eyes were dimmed with tears. Meanwhile Chon Gwang Sik and Chin Il Man came in to report. They brought five rifles.

"What are these?" asked Comrade Kum Song.

"Comrade O Sang Gwon left these for the revolution." Chon Gwang Sik replied in a shaking voice.

"Comrade Sang Gwon?" Taking one of the guns which had been carefully oiled, he cast an inquiring look from one man to the other.

With bowed head, Chin Il Man sat down and explained.

"A month before his arrest, he and Comrade Ok Nyo buried them under a toothache tree on the hill at the back. According to Comrade Ok Nyo, he had been prepared for the worst, though she had not realized it at the time."

A heavy silence followed.

Comrade Kum Song sat stroking the five guns for a long time, talking quietly as if to himself.

"Toksan Valley is stained with revolutionary blood, Comrade Pak Ung Chon, who carried the message about the line adopted at the Chialun Meeting, was also killed here. Flowers will blossom in this land. Let the enemy tremble with fear when he thinks of Toksan. And we must see to it that our new generation come to this remote village and mourn our revolutionary forerunners."

He raised his head abruptly. His eyes flashed like lightning. A hush fell for a moment.

"Comrade Chon Gwang Sik."

"Yes," replied Chon Gwang Sik, springing to his feet.

"Go to the township of Liuho right away. Find that *Jintan* vendor and execute him in the name of the revolution. And make sure that everybody knows why we are executing him."

"I understand."

With a tense look he flung out of the room, holding his pistol at his side.

"Comrade Chin Il Man, start working with these comrades to restore the revolutionary organizations in the Toksan area. Let's first rebuild the Anti-Imperialist Youth League. Find the activists whom Comrade O Sang Gwon trained."

"I will."

As soon as Chin Il Man and the young villagers withdrew, Han Hung Su came in and reported to him on the guerrilla unit's activities in the village. Then he cautiously advised him to have breakfast though it was late. But, unheeding, Comrade Kum Song said they would hear the messengers' reports. The messengers came in.

Headquarters seethed with militancy. That day into this dilapidated, out-of-the-way thatched house at the roadside, all the streams of the Korean revolution flowed together, and formed a turbulent whirlpool. Orderlies were called in and darted out without ceasing, while from time to time Han Hung Su called in various people and the Comrade Commander's boisterous laughter was heard from inside.

The messengers' reports vividly reflected the formidable torrent of the surging revolution.

All the tasks assigned at Small Plot had put down roots and were, one by one, beginning to bear fruit. Both Choe Gi Gap and Li Choi Gun had jumped into the heat of the revolution and done solid groundwork with the firm conviction imbued in them by Comrade Kum Song. The revolution had got into the saddle, and was riding straight ahead to face the frenzied storm of counterrevolution. A similar report had come from Li Hyok up in the north. Kim In Ryong, Kim Chang Mun, Chang Yong and others who had gone to different areas immediately after the guerrilla army was founded in Antu, sent news that they would return to headquarters around October, as well as information on the general conditions in their areas. In a nutshell, all the reports, information and news showed that the spark kindled by Comrade Kum Song had caught, and that the flames were spreading far and wide, beginning with the whole Tuman-gang area and the north.

In response to Comrade Kum Song's appeal "Take up arms!" every one racked his brains and worked daringly in different localities. In some places people painted tar on broken pistols or pasted them with silver paper to make them shine, to raid police stations. In some other places they attacked police stations and police boxes at the ferries, with bags of red pepper and wooden spears for arms. And in some places people made their own bombs to use in the bold fight to get arms. There was one thrilling story: A man had disguised himself as a mourner in a high hemp-cap and had gone to the police station to get permission to slaughter a couple of domestic animals, to distract the enemy while his comrades occupied the armoury. One audacious youth dressed in a Japanese MP's uniform had struck a Japanese policeman across the face and snatched his gun. Even members of the Children's Corps bravely joined in the fight for arms in many areas. A policeman was beaten up with paddles for washing and had his rifle taken off him by Korean

women when he tried to flirt with them while they did their washing.

Comrade Kum Song said: "The revolution has equipped our people with fighting will and courage, with wisdom and creativity." His words, filled with conviction, rang out proudly.

He paid special attention to the reports from the guerrilla bases that were springing up in various areas. In particular, he listened to the report from the Wangching area with a serious expression. He nodded, well satisfied, when he heard Li Chol Gun's news that this vast area, including Spring Valley, Hwangga Village, Pear-Tree Valley and several other villages around Yungping in a corner of one of the ranges of Mt. Mapanshan, had been secured. He laughed out loud as it was reported that the people were in high spirits while the counter-revolution ran like a frightened rat. Everywhere the work was going ahead on forming guerrilla units and securing liberated areas—these were being set up in many places so that the stupefied enemy had had no time to do anything about it. As soon as there was a rumour that a guerrilla base had been set up in one place, a liberated area spread out in another like wildfire.

Times were changing radically. Ever since the Japanese imperialists had stretched their talons of aggression across Korea, many Koreans had left their homes and wandered here and there, carrying loads on their backs or heads. No one invited them in and they had no place to go. However, from this summer, the people's attitudes had fundamentally changed. Everyone walked faster, with a gleam in their eyes; their feet hurried as if time had come to put an end to their accursed plight. People flocked to the liberated areas or guerrilla bases.

"We can well say the streams are multiplying now," commented Comrade Kum Song, gazing out of the window at the mountain ranges over which clouds were rising. "Eventually, all the streams will merge into a single current and form a sea. They surely will. We will provide a tremendous torrent of the times that will overthrow this unjust society. So we must take care that not even a dewdrop on a blade of grass trickles away uselessly."

These words reminded Han Hung Su of O Sang Gwon, who had been the source of the intense grief Comrade Kum Song had suffered throughout the night. In unbounded space, in the infinity of time each human being is as small and frail as the dewdrop that settles on a blade of grass in the

summer night and twinkles in the morning sun. But once in the embrace of the great revolutionary leader Comrade Kum Song, these dewdrops could form a formidable current, flow down through history to reach, eventually, an eternal ocean.

Meanwhile there was sad news occasionally in the reports and information arriving from different zones. When he was told of Li Dong Chon's death in his attempt to get weapons, and of his last words, Comrade Kum Song's face became fixed. Han Hung Su's heart quivered. For each such dewdrop that faded the revolutionary ocean rolled and writhed, clasping the earth in her arms.

In the oppressive silence, Comrade Kum Song rose slowly. He flung open the window and said quietly:

"Li Dong Chon.... Let us engrave his name on our hearts. Let us join the dewdrops into the lapping sea so that none will be wasted."

Then Comrade Kum Song went out with Han Hung Su to make the rounds of the village. He met the villagers and heard all about the political work in the village. Back at headquarters he met more than a hundred youths from the Toksan area who wanted to join the guerrilla force, and gave his decision in each case. Indeed, that day, as if venting the wrath and grief surging through his body, he pushed ahead with his work without a moment's respite.

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The wick was replaced but the light was as dim as before. The old piece of cotton would not suck the oil well though it had been twisted many a time. Ok Nyo gave a long sigh, gazing at the flicker of the oil lamp. At the thought that she was now leaving, many things weighed on her mind. More than once O's mother had said that more cotton cloth would have to be woven for clothes for father and Dok Gwon. And what about the autumn harvest? Dok Gwon would do the field work, and as his uncle lived in the neighbourhood and the revolutionary organizations had been restored, they would see to the needs of this family. However, now that she was helping the parents

for the last time that night, she worried about everything. The flame was flickering, sending up flakes of soot as if to cast a gloom over her disturbed mind. When Sang Gwon was alive he used to light the oil lamp, but even this could not brighten this room that used to be a storeroom. He had made the room habitable, roughly pasting old newspapers on the walls so that he could read prohibited literature secretly in the summer or print handbills. No ray of sunshine ever entered the room, and it was dank all the year round. However, she had become attached to this room. She had lived here nearly a year since Sang Gwon's death. The room was so familiar to her that she had never felt it to be dark or gloomy. But that night it was annoyingly dark to her, and she did not realize that this was because of worrying thoughts on her mind.

Ok Nyo again stopped sewing and looked blankly at the dancing light. She heard voices from the main room. The guerrillas were leaving Toksan Valley in the morning. The General had readily accepted her earnest request to join the unit to avenge Sang Gwon. What was more, he had visited the old couple again and was comforting them late into the night.

Suddenly the first cock saluted the coming dawn. Ok Nyo gave a start and went back to her work. Since the night dew was cold, she thought she must at least fix up the padded jacket for O's mother who suffered from consumption. On top of this, she had to make a rucksack for herself and mend her old clothes to take with her to her new life as a guerrilla.

Dawn was breaking and only sad empty thoughts came to her one after the other.

"How can you, in all conscience, return home? Sang Gwon died working for the nation, so you should stay with his family to the end of your life. That is your duty as a human being." This was what her father had told her. He was such a stubborn man. In a thatched house at Haga Village 80 *ri* away from here, her father must still be working late into the night. Once a teacher at a private school in his home village, her father had come to Haga Village with his family after the ruin of the country and had tilled the burnt patches of land. He had said farewell to his books because it was useless to advocate justice in this unjust world. And yet, justice had always been more important to him than to anybody.

That was three years ago. One day a young stranger had

come to visit her at her house. She had come home for a few days from Sinuiju where she was living at her aunt's house while working at a factory after finishing primary school. He wore a faded dark student uniform and a dazzling white straw hat. When he took off his hat, his close-clipped coarse hair bristled. Her first impression was that he was rather hasty. As soon as he saw her he grinned, showing his firm white teeth. A smile flashed across her blushing face.

"O Sang Gwon is my name. I was told you would be back soon and I've been waiting anxiously for you." He talked to her as to an old friend. His undue familiarity surprised her, and yet, she could not help noticing a freshness, activity and uprightness about him in his threadbare uniform. From the very first day she had found herself obediently following Sang Gwon, though God only knew why. Without hesitation he had demanded that she should do what he asked and went so far as to tell her that this was her duty as a young Korean. In fact he said it so bluntly that it could have been regarded as impolite. When, after many days, she realized that he had spoken that way because he had been shy of her, she smiled to herself. Anyhow Ok Nyo was attracted by this young man who had appeared so suddenly, and soon his own burning passion left her no time to resist. At times he would bring her an armful of books and ask her to read them all before a certain date. He asked her too, to teach at the evening school he had opened. And at times he suggested she should go out to do propaganda work. Whenever he came she felt quite overwhelmed by him, as he vigorously wielded his straw hat. So she had followed the path of revolution with him and, before she knew, both of them had pledged to walk on this road together to the end of their days. As she was staying at Toksan to work on her revolutionary assignments, their families had arranged their marriage and agreed to hold the wedding the following autumn. Then the disaster came. Everything had come and gone like a whirlwind. By now, there was nothing left except the threadbare school uniform, the white straw hat that he had worn both summer and winter and grabbed and waved when he made speeches, and a memory of his merry laughter showing his white teeth.

She had decided not to go back home even before her father had asked her not to. Not because she was under the restraints of feudal morality, but because she felt so angry and her conscience would not let her back down. The work he had left

unfinished was so vital and his sacrifice so great that she could not leave, she could not shrink from it....

Ok Nyo measured the width of the pair of padded socks against her feet. The mother's feet were swollen these days, and if the socks were not made wide enough she would not be able to force her feet into them even using a piece of window paper to get her heel in. So, Ok Nyo made them fairly large and lined them with plenty of cotton.

A stray cat mewed on the top of the wall of the next house and shot over towards the chimney. Ok Nyo gazed absent-mindedly at the flame, with pieces of cloth in her hands. These were now attached to the back of the jacket, where one is most sensitive to cold, and she made a few stitches on the outer collar and the back. When the collar was turned right by the ruler, the jacket looked warm and comfortable though it was old. Ok Nyo patted the soft folds tenderly as if soothing the heart of the old, ailing mother.

"What will father think if I leave without a parting word to him?" Ok Nyo asked herself. She again thought about her father now 80 *ri* away; she had no time to go and see him. He would manage all right because her mother and younger brothers were with him, but he might be angry with her for leaving without telling him. But there was no choice. When she finished her work at dawn, she thought she would write him a long letter. Truth to tell, there were many things she could not tell him to his face. She was sure that he would understand why she was leaving. Though he was a man of few words, her father understood his daughter's feelings better than anyone else.

She had stopped working on the collar of the jacket and had turned her blank eyes in the direction of Haga Village when she heard the door of the main room open. There were voices exchanging words of parting, footsteps crossed the yard and the sound of shoes dragged towards the gate. Comrade Kum Song was returning to his billet. Ok Nyo hurriedly put aside her things and opened the paper door. In the dim light of the half moon she could clearly see his figure moving towards the outer yard. Then Han Hung Su went through the front gate. Ok Nyo came down from the porch and bowed with reverence. When she lifted her face, she saw Comrade Kum Song saying something to Han Hung Su, before he went. Han came back. The yard was quiet now—father, mother and Dok Gwon

had gone into the house. On entering the yard, Han Hung Su paused with a start to find Ok Nyo there.

"Haven't you gone to bed? The General was worried about you, and he was right."

"Don't worry about me. I'm just preparing for tomorrow...." As she realized that Han Hung Su had come back simply because of her, she felt a prickling sensation in her nose and turned away.

"You must have a good rest before the march. Have you a lot to do still?"

"Nothing much. I have been pottering about.... I'll go to sleep right away."

"Better go to bed now. The Comrade Commander is anxious." However, after Han Hung Su had gone, she was even more wide awake. She pulled the only cotton jacket she used to wear at Sinuiju to pieces. As she placed the paper patterns of socks on them, she found there was just enough material to make socks—the jacket was torn in several places. She took some cotton out of the sewing box and stuffed the pair of socks with plenty of cotton.

She was about to thread the needle when she heard footsteps outside. In order not to disturb those who were sleeping in the main room, Ok Nyo carefully opened the door to see who it was. The late visitor was Yong Suk, the woman guerrilla, with whom she had made friends. With a cheerful smile, Yong Suk was led into the room and sat down beside the lamp. Her slightly swollen eyes showed that she had just woken up. At the thought that Yong Suk had been sent by Company Commander Han Hung Su, Ok Nyo again felt a lump in her throat. It was impossible to deceive Yong Suk's perception of a woman. The girl rummaged among the sewing box and bundles and took all the needlework with her.

She had only the one pair of padded socks to finish. Though Yong Suk had urged her to go to sleep, Ok Nyo did not think she could. She was leaving this room where Sang Gwon used to live. She was leaving Toksan where Sang Gwon's dreams, his hopes had first taken wing. The soldier had fallen, and she would never again stroll up and down the hillock where the solitary green poplar stood in bold relief against the sky.

At last she turned the pair of socks on the right side, but she felt her hands relaxed. Meantime, she was restless because

of her imminent departure, and her heart was again filled with sad thoughts. She searched the sewing box for the notebook Sang Gwon had left. It had been hidden deep in a wicker trunk and she had taken it out while looking for material to make her rucksack. She had decided to take it with her, come what might. She leafed the pages absent-mindedly. It was a diary he had kept when he was in Kirin. The pages were damp and smelt strongly of soil. They brought to life a world she had not seen, which yet was very familiar and dear to her. Again she leafed through the book that she had read scores of times, through pages stained with her tears. His impressions of new friends, his excitement after a heated debate, his comments on the books he had read, entries about important events or trivial happenings at school and many other scraps of information, all written vividly in sweeping strokes. All of them that had made a strong impression on Sang Gwon at the time, though many might now, in the eyes of others, seem insignificant. To Ok Nyo, however, each entry was priceless for it had excited her lover when he was alive. The English teacher's spectacles slipping on his nose, the fortune teller at Peishan Park, the fat-bellied proprietor of a rice-cleaning mill, the soldier in the Independence Army who died of a lung hemorrhage, an immigrant family from Cholla Province who had spent the night at Kirin railway station, and a "cheap magazine" which carried a certain rascal's poem lauding death and the "indiscreet drunkard's" article clumsily touching on Malthus's Essay on the Principle of Population. It was all written so vividly that she could see every detail as if she had been there herself.

After reading several pages, she came to a bit that held her every time she read it. In the lines, written in a clear hand, Comrade Kum Song's name was conspicuous here and there. Ok Nyo pushed up the lamp wick with the tip of the needle and held up the book in the light.

"...Han Hung Su said. So did I. 'Comrade Kum Song—he is a comet.'

"A comet has appeared, shedding resplendent rays through the veiled darkness of our homeland.

"Everybody who attended the students' gathering today at Peishan Park felt this.

"Today Comrade Kum Song spoke for more than two hours. His shrewd analysis of the present time and his bril-

liant picture of the Korean revolution were completely original and perfect; there is no theoretician or leader that can hold a candle to him. Right, audacious, profound and full of truth, yet all so simply put—his speech gripped us all and moved us to tears.

"I feel as if I was reborn. My courage is soaring, I feel confident. What is so characteristic is that everything about him is simple and yet extraordinary. Take today's speech, for example. Words and expressions we often use, when used by him, form a strong and deep stream of thought, as if tempered by many hard trials of the times. He spoke at the top of his voice, wielding his hand against the blue sky and vividly illuminated a new course for the Korean people now groaning under the yoke of Japanese imperialism, a course towards a glorious future.

"Kum Song—the guiding star of thirty millions.

"At Peishan Park."

The entry was interrupted here. Ok Nyo pressed the notebook against her breast and closed her eyes. She could hear Sang Gwon's voice ringing in her ears. Her emotion surged up as if she were standing in Peishan Park right now. He had quite often talked to her just as he wrote in his diary. She remembered again what he had said to her early one winter day when the mountains and fields were covered in a white blanket of snow, the night when he hid the guns. In the dead of night Ok Nyo followed him up to the back hill. Sang Gwon was carrying his load wrapped in straw matting tied up with a rope, and Ok Nyo a pick and shovel. While Sang Gwon dug the ground and buried the load, Ok Nyo stood on guard a little way off.

"Comrade Ok Nyo." Sang Gwon called to her in a shaky voice as they had climbed down to the foot of the mountain. "Remember the spot. Ten steps southwest of the bend in the rock, there is a toothache tree, and under it three flintlocks and two modern rifles lie buried."

"It's our usual place; we'll remember it all right."

"Yes, I feel very relieved now."

Sang Gwon heaved a great sigh as he looked up at the sky still dark before the dawn.

"Ok Nyo, when the time comes, we'll dig up the guns and

make revolution under Comrade Kum Song, to our last days. This thought excites me beyond measure. Just imagine, I will be carrying a gun on my shoulder and so will you. We will be marching in the same ranks for ever as revolutionaries. There will be ranks in front of us and behind us, too. But you and I will walk abreast. All our lives."

Ok Nyo's heart had beaten violently. The blizzard dashed against her cheeks, but she did not feel it. Her heart beat wildly as though she were on a swing. But she just followed her lover, pressing her breast with both her hands. It was so full that she could hardly breathe. They walked together for a while, when Sang Gwon called her in a broken voice. As she raised her head, he paused and, staring into her eyes, put his hand on her shoulder.

"Comrade Ok Nyo, don't forget the revolution is hard. You never know what may happen. So we must do all our work with a sense of responsibility. We must free ourselves from subjectivism and, in the light of merciless reality, must be prepared for everything. I don't mean something will inevitably happen, but if you're underground it's your duty to be ready for anything. So don't forget what I'm going to tell you now. Don't regard it as inevitable; but remember it is possible. If I cannot dig up those guns myself, you must do it for me. And go with our comrades to Comrade Kum Song and report."

On hearing this Ok Nyo's heart froze, and she looked at him beseechingly, unable to utter a word. Sang Gwon's face was so severe that he looked like another man. And far from comforting the girl who stood petrified in the blizzard, he went on in a stern voice.

"If you can't dig them up yourself, you must pass on what I have told you to other comrades. You understand? Even though we ourselves may die, the Korean revolution led by Comrade Kum Song must move ahead. Then our lives will be worth living."

Only when he uttered the last words did his voice return to its usual cheery and passionate tone. This eased the strain she was feeling and she turned to wipe away her tears. Yet, at the time, she did not know why Sang Gwon had said all this.

Things had turned out unfortunately as he had expected, and Ok Nyo dug up the guns under the gaunt toothache tree—ten steps to the southwest of the bend in the rock on the mountain. And on Sang Gwon's behalf she had told Comrade

Kum Song the secret of the guns shared by just two people, a secret that was only to be divulged to the revolutionary leader. Now, she would carry one of the five guns on her shoulder. But without him who should have marched abreast of her with his own gun to the end of their days. He should not have said so, should he? Comrade Kum Song whom he had longed to see had come to this remote mountain village but he could not see him because he had left the fighting ranks so early. Recalling that night when he said in such passionate tones that making revolution under Comrade Kum Song's guidance was their life's work, Ok Nyo felt a thrill of fierce passion run through her.

She had finished the socks and folded them with the jacket, and had written a long letter to her father. The eastern sky began to pale, though the half moon still hung over the poplar. It was too early as yet to make breakfast. But she could no longer stay in the room. She was worried about the housework, because it would be left to the weak, ailing mother. She had to bring in firewood and clean the fireplace. She went into the kitchen and opened the big water jar. Water would be a big problem now. Dok Gwon would bring the firewood once in a while but who would fetch the water, which was needed all the time? For some moments she looked forlornly at the silent main room, then went out with a water jar.

She had often walked along this road with Sang Gwon. The moon still shed its light on the road where it faded into the distance beyond the rise. More than once a day Ok Nyo had walked along this road, the water jar on her head.

This dawn, however, found her walking alone on the deserted road, and her heart was filled with desolation. She went past the long kitchen garden, across the barren plateau overgrown with purple eulalias, to the foot of the hill. Often she had stood here at night beside Sang Gwon. Sometimes there was moonlight, sometimes it snowed. In spring the nights were warm and pleasant, and insects chirped with unusual fastidiousness. And with Sang Gwon always by her side it seemed bright under a half moon and warm in a snowstorm.

By the well Ok Nyo tucked up her skirt and crouched on the stone. As she rinsed the gourd ladle, the half moon reflected on the water pulled a face as if about to weep and then disappeared altogether. Closing her quivering lips she ladled up the water. "I must fill the water jar in the kitchen before mother gets up. I'm going to fill the big cooking pot which is not used

now, and any other jars. It will save her the trouble of coming here to fetch water at least for the time being." As she hastened her steps the gourd ladle floating on the water swayed and streaks of cold water slopped out of the jar and down her cheeks. Ok Nyo walked steadily, lifting her hand mechanically to wipe the edge of the jar. And yet her thoughts lingered on.

She had filled the huge water jar but the moon was still shining. The empty bean-paste jar and the big cooking pot were full of water; she had neatly wiped them with a dish cloth first and covered them. The large dish and water basin were also filled with fresh water. There was yet time before daybreak. If she began to lay the fire in the oven, it might wake the old people who had gone to bed late last night. While cleaning the kitchen utensils she emptied two small *kimchi* jars and rinsed them. Each of them would hold enough water to cook rice for one meal. With the water jar under her arm, she again went out to the barren plateau where the purple eulalias danced. At the spring, she found the white half moon shivering and looking up at her, as if smiling. Where was the other half? When she ladled the water the moon hid itself and then came back again to gaze at her. This made Ok Nyo very anxious. Where had the other half really gone?...

That night the full moon had looked like a silver water basin in the water. Yes, he had said that—it looked like a silver water basin....

It was the first summer that she knew him. One drizzly night they had visited a village some 20 *ri* away to form a branch of the Women's Association. Since they had started late they were returning at midnight. By that time the rain had stopped and the moon had risen. He had still felt awkward in her presence and had talked in a pretentious tone, instead of speaking affectionate words to match such a night. Reaching Toksan Valley Sang Gwon had begun to boast about the water in his village. Evidently he had chosen this subject because he had nothing else to talk about. But this youth of great passion insisted that the water was the world's best, and finally he took her down the slippery slope to the spring. She crouched on the stone and held the water in her cupped hands. She felt shy as he watched her from behind, so that when she brought her hands up to her mouth there was not a drop of water left.

"How do you like it? As sweet as honey, isn't it?"

"Sweet as honey indeed." Ok Nyo had answered in a low voice though she had not even tasted the water.

"See how I drink. You want to gulp this sort of water down like an ox...."

Sang Gwon knelt down on the stone and, supporting himself by both hands, bent forward. When his face was nearly touching the water, he stopped dead.

"What are you looking at?"

"Look at that!"

At that moment the full moon had burst through the cloud and reflected its face in the water. The narrow surface of the well which had looked dark and gloomy, shone brightly and tremendous summer clouds soared like rugged mountains. The moon elbowed through the purple patches of cloud and shot up into the clear sky.

"Oh, the moon....," whispered Ok Nyo, clasping her hands, as if seeing it for the first time in her life.

"It looks like a silver water basin."

Both of them looked into the water, holding their heads like children. Then the moon was erased by clouds and the two faces became a faint reflection in the water. And yet, the two fancied that they were still watching the moon. Probably the moon was so bashful that it had hidden behind the clouds.

Some moments later, Sang Gwon looked up and said, embarrassed:

"It really looked like a silver water basin.... I've never seen a moon like that before."

But though she looked up she could not see the moon itself—it was hiding behind the clouds. Her face flushed a deep red, Ok Nyo could find no word to say.

"Pure, clear and infinite—ah, life is so beautiful and worthwhile...." Sang Gwon said to the bright moonlit sky, as though reciting a verse. The words were indeed filled with the joy of life. This stout soul, so dynamic that neither storm nor mountain could even seem to stand in his way, now slept under a patch of turf.

A chilly early morning wind rose. The pale half moon wrinkled gently and disappeared, and a leaf fell from the hill onto the surface of the water. Ok Nyo still had a fancy that her lover's image remained in the water.

The ripped dark school uniform thrown over his bruised shoulders, he had climbed up that hillock, clamping down the

knee-deep snow. Where was his tender voice whispering that the moon looked like a silver water basin? The lips that had revealed the row of white teeth whenever he smiled were cracked and blistered. Yet, he was filled with a greater passion still than when he used to wield his straw hat, and he uttered the most beautiful words before he died.

"Villagers, they have brought me out here to betray you and to force me to speak out against communism. They say if I don't do so, they will kill me. That's why this hole has been dug. But how can I betray you? How can I betray the parents who bore me and raised me, betray my brothers, comrades and neighbours and my homeland? Just to live long is not human; what is human is to keep one's faith to the last. Villagers, communism is our country's future. We must take the path to communism. We must follow the road of revolution guided by General Kum Song. Follow General Kum Song. He will surely free our homeland and lead you to a happier society. Long live the great leader of the Korean revolution General Kum Song!"

There was the sharp report of a gun, as a leaf fell from the tree to which Sang Gwon was tied, the rest of the leaves scattered and flew off like a flock of birds. His head dropped yet he raised it once again. That impressive smile so familiar to her flashed across his lips.

"Neighbours, the General will surely come...."

One shot after another rang out....

With shaking hand, Ok Nyo picked the leaf from the surface of the water and let her gaze wander up the hill to the poplar tree. Wasn't this the tree whose leaves had scattered like a flock of birds, leaves that were still falling down here? Wasn't this early morning silence without even an insect's chirping an extension of that silence, as awe-inspiring as the silence of the universe, that had followed those shots?

Suddenly Ok Nyo gave a start and looked up. The dark figure of a man stood under the poplar, a big man silhouetted clearly against the sky at dawn. Ok Nyo craned her neck and strained her eyes. It was a man, no doubt. He looked silently up at the top of the poplar that soared into the sky and stroked its trunk. Then he paced to and fro under the tree.

Who could it be? Ok Nyo got to her feet. The wind started to blow. Brushing back her hair she took an involuntary step forward. The man was facing east, looking down at the fields spread out at his feet.

"Oh, it is General Kum Song!"

Ok Nyo was thunderstruck. It was indeed General Kum Song, the great revolutionary leader, who stood on the hill at early dawn while the cold dew was falling, looking up at the poplar and stroking it and walking back and forth in silence, his head bowed. When day broke the guerrillas would leave this valley of Toksan where the solitary poplar stood. Parting from a live man might not be quite so hard; however sad the parting, you might hope to be reunited. Why was it that the leader had been standing in silence and stroking the poplar tree in the early hours? The revolutionary leader's love and the revolutionary soldier's reverence, and their unbounded mutual trust and affection were so interblended that his feet would not move.

These were cruel times and people shed many tears and suffered many sorrows. But revolutionaries did not weep. They even faced death with a smile on their lips. A tear shed by a Communist is not the tear of an individual; it is a grief for which all people should weep.

Again Comrade Kum Song looked up at the top of the poplar. And raising his arm, he again stroked the stocky trunk, soaked in Sang Gwon's blood.

Ok Nyo hung her head. Her whole heart was filled with an austere feeling which overwhelmed all her sorrows. Only one feeling, the feeling of reverence for this great man, Comrade Kum Song, rushed through all her veins. Hot tears coursed down her cheeks. But they were not the tears of sorrow. The great wonder that she had a leader who loved his people so much and looked after his soldiers with such great care had drawn the tears that poured down her cheeks.

When she raised her head forgetting to wipe away her tears, the shafts of the morning sun stretched from the eastern horizon into the purple eulalia bushes. The gauzy morning mists which had been resting upon the surrounding scenery began to drift away. Comrade Kum Song climbed slowly down the hill. Ok Nyo had no time to hide or think. She hastily held the head pad behind her back and stepped off the road. Only then did she see another figure under a toothache tree yonder who followed the General at a distance. It was Han Hung Su. All night he had been guarding the Comrade Commander, unseen by anyone, even the Comrade Commander himself.

Ok Nyo had often come across Han Hung Su's name in Sang Gwon's diary. Han Hung Su who had worked with Comrade Kum Song since the days of the Down-with-Imperialism Union at Huatien was liked and respected by all his friends. He always regarded it as a duty to accompany and guard the Comrade Commander; he had never been proud of his talents or skill. So some of his friends would say that they could learn and emulate his enthusiasm for work or his organizing ability but never could they match him in loyalty to Comrade Kum Song. Sang Gwon too had once said this. Han Hung Su had always followed Comrade Kum Song like a shadow to protect him. Every step he took unseen was tied up with his deep love for the homeland and the people, for his comrades-in-arms. This thought made Ok Nyo feel ashamed of herself, she who had been overwhelmed by her own sorrow.

On climbing up the hill Han Hung Su looked up at the poplar, patted its trunk and lowered his head.

"Isn't it Comrade Ok Nyo? You're up already, eh?" asked Comrade Kum Song in a loud voice, pausing a few steps away.

"Good morning...."

Ok Nyo made a grave bow but faltered, unable to find words to greet him.

"I was told that you were awake late at night. Do you think you are equal to your first march?" He said this in an anxious tone as he approached her unhurriedly and looked down at the well.

"So this is the well, yes? Would you hand me the gourd ladle?"

Ok Nyo quickly picked up the ladle dipped upside down in the water jar and rinsed it.

"Give it to me. One must drink this water by oneself."

Comrade Kum Song squatted and ladled a gourdful of water. As he swallowed the water, his figure was reflected in the well like a picture.

"Ah, how fresh!"

At the sound of his voice Ok Nyo glanced at the hill. Han Hung Su was nowhere to be seen—only the poplar swayed in the early morning wind.

It was a clear, bracing august morning.

Comrade Kum Song lifted the water jar to help her raise it to the head. And he preceded her along the lane through the plateau carpeted with purple eulalias.

"Are you ready?"

"Yes, I'm fully prepared."

"That's good. And did you tell them at Haga Village?"

Ok Nyo stopped abruptly. How did he know my village?

"Your parents live in Haga Village, don't they?" he inquired, continuing to walk slowly, apparently unaware that she had paused.

"My family lives in Haga Village. I've written a letter to my father."

"It's only 80 *ri* from here, and you have written? You can never tell when you will be back, you know?"

He turned round, as if it was quite unexpected. Ok Nyo lowered her eyes, holding the water jar on her head. He sounded slightly remonstrative. After a few moments, he went on walking leisurely. As the morning glow receded gradually, the sky was turning blue. The pale half moon which had remained in a corner of the sky like a speck of cloud had vanished.

"They say you have been awfully busy. You are leaving Toksan Valley but you should not neglect things here. You are quite right. Your case is quite different from others' and I fully approve your idea, of course. I understand why you came out with the water jar early this morning. But think of your father, Comrade Ok Nyo. It's your parents who are saddest at your sorrow. I was deeply touched to hear what your father told you. If circumstances permitted me, I should have visited him on Comrade Sang Gwon's behalf. And if you didn't go and see him, it would be against reason."

Her eyes were veiled with tears, and Ok Nyo could hardly carry her feet. Like a lost soul, she walked automatically along the accustomed path. "He is reproaching me. Who else could make this sort of reprimand, except my own parents?" she asked herself. Tearfully moved by his overflowing affection, Ok Nyo's head jerked as if weighed down by the water jar.

"Fortunately, we have a horse-cart going in that direction today. One of our messengers is going through your village. Be ready after breakfast and come to my headquarters."

"General, please take me along. I must follow you. I've written a letter to my father." Ok Nyo said hastily, calming down her heart thumping with emotion.

"So you didn't understand what I was telling you? My unit cannot leave today. We still need a day and a half to finish our work here. Don't worry and go. How could we leave you

behind? I'm advising you because I've got my own plan. So don't you worry. Go and do convey my regards to your father."

"General!"

Ok Nyo stopped and burst out crying. The water jar shook violently. She supported it with her hand but because of the heavy heaving of her shoulders, cold water splashed over the edge and flowed down. He walked on as slowly as ever, as though he felt and saw nothing. The resplendent morning sun shone on his broad back.

The mountain lane carpeted with grass had disappeared before she had reached the top of the hill. However, turning off at the accustomed bend she ran up to the top where wild flowers were in full bloom. White wild chrysanthemums flowered in profusion here and there. When she rounded the eastern slope covered with thistles and wild rose vines she saw a shrubbery thick with wormwoods. As she emerged on the southern slope a wide prospect burst into view. A few oak trees with thick leaves were glittering in the sun. Under them was a layer of turf adorned with wild flowers. Sang Gwon's grave was on this sunny hillside where mountain birds sang all day long.

Ok Nyo put down her rucksack and gun in front of the stone offertory table, and picked flowers. She brought an armful of white chrysanthemums, wild roses, purple bells and *turub* flowers and placed them on the grave. Soon the grave was ornamented with flowers of all colours. Ok Nyo knelt down. She felt the stone offertory table. It had been warmed by the sun. She arranged some flowers and looked affectionately at the grave. She slowly lifted her gun and said in gentle undertones.

"Comrade Sang Gwon, farewell. If I leave now, I don't know when I'll come back. As you wished, I'll follow the revolutionary path to the end of my days under the General's guidance. And one day I will come back here to you. We trekked the muddy road together, didn't we? And now that the weather is fine, I'm going on alone. But you opened up the path for many people. I dug up the guns you buried under the toothache tree. The General told me to carry one of them on my shoulder. With this gun I'll follow the General as you said, I'm so happy. Well, I'm going. I'll achieve all that you wanted me to achieve and I'll visit you again. Rest in peace until I come back to you."

Ok Nyo slowly rose to her feet. She shouldered her rucksack and the gun. She picked one wild rose out of the huge bunch of flowers piled on the stone table. Her eyes still resting on the grave, she took one backward step after another, then left.

There was not a speck of cloud in the boundless expanse of sky.

The column of armed soldiers moved across the green field. Ok Nyo hurried after them and joined them.

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The figures of those who had followed them to the outskirts of the village were getting smaller and smaller, though their cries of farewell still lingered in the air. People from the whole village had come up the hill to see them off, and, they had been joined by many who lived in adjacent hamlets. This was natural, for in the last few days more than a hundred youths from this area had volunteered to serve in the guerrilla army. And organizations that had been inactive for a while had been revived. Since the guerrilla troops had settled here, the Japanese soldiers had been so scared that they had fled elsewhere under the pretext of a regular movement, and the local police and the scum in the "Self-Defence Corps" had been frightened out of their wits, unable to stir.

The guerrillas, carrying with them the good wishes of the people of Toksan, their tears at parting and their warm applause, skirted the mountain and came out onto the plain. The morning was fresh, and the fragrant scent of green fields was wafted on the wind. The sun was already high above the eastern mountains, but the air still held the freshness of morning. Crickets were singing in the thick grass still wet with dew. Hovering high in the endless blue sky, a lark trilled noisily, as if calling or trying to attract attention.

*We are the fire spreading all over,
We are the hammer crushing the iron chains....*

A powerful voice led the chorus. Now that they all were singing, feet stamped harder on the earth.

The guerrillas were on the move. The Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army born out of the great revolutionary idea was marching forward, engraving in their iron hearts the people's aspirations, hopes and beliefs, shouldering their guns loaded with the people's wrath, vengeance and grief.

The column was so long that when it was turning off round a mountain, you could hardly see the front from the rear. You could see the dependable veterans who had grown sturdily through the revolutionary tempest ever since Kirin. And you could see many who had laid aside their hoes and hammers for rifles when the guerrilla army was founded. There were the newcomers who had volunteered for service during the last expedition, among them O In Gwon, a cousin of O Sang Gwon, and other young villagers from the Toksan area. At the rear of the column Yong Suk was marching with other women guerrillas, among them Ok Nyo who had got back from her house in Haga Village the night before. She was in high spirits, her gun on her shoulder. But it was no easy job to recognize the individual faces in these huge ranks that were surging forward united.

The unit that had remained at Antu had grown. Many local guerrilla forces had emerged. Back at Liangkang all the guerrilla ranks would have to be reorganized to suit the new and larger force.

"We may still say we are a tributary, but before long we will form an ocean," Comrade Kum Song said to himself as he stepped on a small rise to look down at the great ranks winding ahead. Han Hung Su and Chin Il Man who accompanied him looked at them with deep emotion. Chin Il Man was going to stay behind and work at Toksan for the time being. He had left together with the unit to see them off and then to leave on a liaison mission for Pansih where Li Hong Gwang was working.

The close-knit ranks marched past Comrade Kum Song. And deep in his heart he saw that torrent as the future to come.

There were more than ruins which the Japanese imperialists had overrun; no longer just tears and sighs came from the mud walls scorched by "punitive operations" and from the furniture and household goods crushed under their jackboots.

"Strike at Japanese imperialism, our sworn enemy!"

Tenacious souls rose out of the sea of blood left by these "punitive operations", out of the ashes in the ravaged areas.

They suppressed their tears and grief; their fighting songs were ringing out. The death of O Sang Gwon sent more than a hundred new members to the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army. The "punitive operations" against Big Valley led to a new liberated area—the Wangching guerrilla base.

"Good. Let's have a confrontation. You blackguards have lost your chance....," he said to himself, a cold smile on his lips.

"By the time you get here, we'll be far away. You swine will have to come where we want you to come and you will die when we want you to die. Yes, we'll form an ocean."

In Comrade Kum Song's mind the ocean was already rolling. He gazed up at the sky, feeling a great idea rising like clouds in his heart. A skylark flashed towards the horizon. There was not a trace of cloud in the azure sky. Presently the good earth began to emit its hot breath, and the purple haze shimmered over the green fields. A rough hillock appeared to the left.

"Well, well, the skylark will have reached Mengchiang by now." Comrade Kum Song spoke joyfully to Han Hung Su who had caught up with him.

The village of Liangkiang was lively once again. The first Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army group had come here last spring, at dusk on a warm day when the magpies had been shrilling from early morning. Now midsummer was gone and cool days were stealing up on the village.

The troops, back from their long march, were billeted in people's homes, spending their time in study, while awaiting fresh instructions from headquarters. Since last spring their ranks had multiplied and had grown into a reliable force, tempered by many a hardship. They looked well in their uniforms and had become accustomed to army life. Their guns and knapsacks and their conversation were deeply tinged with the same colour—with guerrilla life.

In the very yard where last spring Pak Hung Dok had brought paper and saluted in clumsy fashion, Comrade Kum Song was walking leisurely back and forth; he was analysing the internal and external situation from the point of the revolution and summing up the long march of the last few months through the Amnok-gang River area, in order to map out new policies.

After leaving Liuho, his unit had stayed at Mengchiang for two months, giving the new members political and military training while making contact with the troops of the Anti-Japanese National Salvation Army.

The unit expanded as more and more newcomers arrived. Consequently, political and military training had to be intensified not only for the main force of the guerrilla army but for the numerous other units that had been formed in different areas almost simultaneously. While at Mengchiang, Comrade Kum Song had dispatched his men to many different places. Through them specific instructions had been given to organize short political and military training courses, and he had sent out study materials and programmes he had prepared himself. Another major aspect of his activities at Mengchiang was

making contact with National Salvation Army units. The urgent need of his policy to form an anti-imperialist united front had first received confirmation last spring when contact was made with Commander Wi's unit; later, it had been proved beyond doubt by the situation in the areas examined at Mengchiang during the last two months and here at Liangkang. He had realized that unless this problem was solved properly, the revolution would suffer a big setback, and had decided that radical measures would have to be taken in due course.

Comrade Kum Song had followed closely the domestic and international developments affected by the enemy's counterrevolutionary offensives. He had mapped out ways of dealing with these by analysing information from the press, from messengers and from the inhabitants. For the second half of the year it would be inevitable to take the course he had already envisaged last spring, but every change in the situation would have to be handled shrewdly.

That day Comrade Kum Song, deep in meditation, was pacing the yard, gazing at the sunset.

Putting it briefly, the advance of the "Greater Empire of Japan" on the continent had come to a sudden halt. Japanese imperialist rulers had tried hard to hush up the development, but major repercussions at home and abroad had forced them to let it leak out somehow. Nevertheless, the Japanese press and radio were resorting to every trick in the book to divert public attention. For example, they were exaggerating the latest invasion of Jehol in China by the Japanese imperialist aggressor army and clamouring for Japan's official recognition of puppet "Manchukuo". In the final analysis, the main reason why they were up against it was that the Korean problems they regarded as settled two decades ago had again come to the fore.

"You rascals have been caught knee-deep in the ruins you made yourselves. You will be sucked in waist-deep and up to your heads even." He spoke to himself, walking up and down in a leisurely way, his hands behind his back.

Sensible people had long foreseen the present developments after what the Japanese imperialists had been doing. The Japanese imperialism that emerged out of the Meiji Restoration could be characterized as a *samurai* with a topknot riding a bicycle in a *hakama* and a pair of straw sandals. Like the novice shaman who kills a man, this deformed child, Ja-

panese imperialism began to wield the sword the moment it made its debut in contemporary history. On his departure for Europe and America towards the end of 1871, Japan's Minister Plenipotentiary Iwakura was saluted with a salvo of 19 guns at Yokohama. This was a virtual declaration of war on all the objectives of overseas aggression Japan had in mind. A few months later Japan swallowed the Ryukyu Islands and annexed Okinawa; then, right after the shackling Sino-Japan treaty Japan gouged Taiwan out of China. Soon afterwards she wrenched off the Kuril Islands and helped herself to Southern Sakhalin. This was followed by her occupation of Korea or what they called a "bonanza". Then after a brief period to digest all this, the Japanese bit into Manchuria and the Chinese mainland.

Political circles in Japan were utterly confused because they felt uneasy about the possible consequences of their excessive greed and savage bravery. In the five years since Prime Minister Tanaka's resignation there had been seven Cabinet reshuffles, one scuffle after the other taking place. The Society of Young Army Officers which came into being last year, simultaneously with the "Manchurian Incident" went too far even in their own eyes; and just a few months ago the warlords engineered the May 15 coup and the Japanese prime minister was murdered like a dog. This confusion coincided with the recent long march of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army.

Needless to say, everything conceivable was done to solve this problem in good time. Since the "Conference of Three Army Chiefs" held around this time last year extra army and police had been sent in so that now the northern regions of Korea were almost a forest of bristling bayonets. After provoking the "September 18 Incident" in Manchuria the Japanese tightened the noose around Korea's neck. They carried out their last "mopping-up operation" against communism. Up until last year there had been eight batches of wholesale arrests and almost all Korea's Communists had been sifted out. In Chientao province there had been upwards of 30 wholesale arrests recently.

But what was happening now? Where the hell did the Korean guerrillas come from, crisscrossing a vast expanse of country and hitting the "Imperial Army" on its way to the continent from the rear? Could this really be happening? This was what the enraged rulers of the "Greater Empire of Japan" kept asking themselves.

Now large-scale army movements were under way: Four infantry divisions moved to the north via the port of Pusan and two cavalry divisions and six garrison units landed on Chongjin. The Kwantung Army and the "Korea Command" were ordered to carry out "massive punitive operations" and ostentatious watchwords to camouflage the "cultured" rule—"Cultivating cotton in the south and raising sheep in the north", "Fostering owner farmers", "Physiocratic policy", "Universal brotherhood" and "Application of Metropolitan favours"—were all thrown overboard.

"Kill and burn indiscriminately!" and "Nip the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army in the bud!" were now the watchwords of Japanese imperialism. These were the watchwords that interrupted the continental advance of the "Korea Command" and the Kwantung Army and caused them to suddenly change their targets. The operational movements of the "Chientao Expeditionary Force" have started. This unit was formed solely to stifle the revolutionary forces around the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army in the Tuman-gang River area. Some Kwantung Army units came southeastward from Kirin and Tunhua, another unit cut diagonally northeast from Chonsangdegi via Mukden, to try to intercept and pursue the main force of the guerrilla army. Flanked by these forces, the "Chientao Expeditionary Force" was preparing to overrun all the guerrilla bases along the Tuman-gang River that had come into being in the summer. A Japanese regiment with several auxiliary units moved along the bank of the river across Chongsong and Hoeryong towards the Wangching area, to make the first attempt to break through the bases.

Raising his clenched fist and thumping it down, Comrade Kum Song said to himself, determinedly:

"Yes, we must smash the very first move in the enemy's overall plan for any 'punitive operation' against our bases."

Shortly afterwards he asked one of his orderlies to fetch Han Hung Su and Chon Gwang Sik, and went into his room.

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Three days after he left Liangkiang, Choe Chil Song

arrived at the top of the hill behind Ssoksae Valley. The long march of more than one thousand *ri* had faded his uniform, bronzed and toughened his face and made him look fit with the flintlock slung across his shoulder. He shaded his eyes and looked down at the village over which the mountains had begun to cast their shadows. This valley was called Ssoksae or Horsetail Valley because of its luxuriant horsetail plants. Some hundred peasant houses huddled together along the valley beside the stream. The highway cut right through the centre of the village, connecting the northeast with the southwest, and the stream wound alongside the road.

He reached his house when the evening sun hung low on the mountains, and even the stones cast long shadows on the roadside. His house had vanished. The burnt joists lay on the ground and the flat floor-stones were cracked. With every breath of wind, ashes fluttered in the air. His heart sank and he looked round, bewildered. He had heard a lot about Japanese brutalities but he had never expected they would do this to him. He felt dazed and his heart contracted painfully. He put down his rucksack on a rock and ran up the hill to get a bird's eye view of the village. This hamlet called Spring Valley was the only one in Ssoksae Valley that had been reduced to ashes. His heart beat wildly and the hot breath rose in his throat. He turned round quickly to look down at the hamlet again, though he knew there was nothing left. His face clouded in despair, he climbed down listlessly, clutching at his chest as he came to the all-too familiar well. He lay on the stone and drank the water as if to put out the fire burning in his heart. At this moment Jagunnyo's mother came along with a jar in her arm and fell back. She saw the rough face of a man on his hands and knees reflected on the water, with that frightful thing, a gun across his shoulder.

"Good Heavens, is it possible...."

The woman who was rather voluble put down the water jar and came close to Choe Chil Song, dropping her hands in amazement.

"I wondered who it was. I heard you'd joined the army and...."

She looked at his cap, a bit wrinkled from the rain, his chest thrown out, his waist pulled in with a belt and the neat pair of shoes, before she again exclaimed her amazement. She ladled up the water in great haste and hurried down the

slope, her rough hemp skirt rustling through the bushes. In a very beautiful and sonorous voice that contrasted with her plump body, she yelled: "Look, girl. The soldier is home. The soldier."

After she had repeated it several times, the matting door opened and dark-faced Ssanggama, Choe Chil Song's wife, came staggering out, dragging her shoes. The water jar still on her head, Jagunnyo's mother chattered noisily for a good while as though she had seen a man back from the dead, before she disappeared into the ravine dotted with huts.

For a few moments Choe Chil Song and his wife stood staring at each other, speechless. Then Ssanggama came to her senses and, still pressing her hand against her breast, approached her husband.

"Husband, you're back."

At the voice of his beloved wife, which he had been yearning to hear, a broad grin spread across his fleshy face, and walking towards her in the soldierly gait to which he was now accustomed, he took her hands.

"How are you?"

Ssanggama gazed at him for a few seconds with frightened eyes, and turned away her tearful face. Choe Chil Song looked at her anxiously and held her shoulders tight, the way a child does with a beautiful bird lest it escape.

"Oh, my.... Don't cry."

The reproach in his words intimated that when she felt happy she should show it. Despite his unrefined manners, he regarded himself as superior to his wife in every way. He then asked after her health and how she had been faring and so on, and they walked hand in hand towards the door.

Raising her neatly parted head, Ssanggama looked at her husband with sparkling eyes and put up her hands to take the rucksack off his shoulders. Startled, she drew her hands back to her red lips.

"You have a gun."

"A soldier carries a gun...."

Laughing, Choe Chil Song slung off the gun instead of taking off the rucksack. Again Ssanggama looked at him in round-eyed astonishment. His behaviour and his way of talking were so changed that he looked like another man. His low voice had become so resonant, his bent shoulders had straightened up and his movements were quick and agile. She raised her long

lashes and smiled at him, and only then, pushed from behind by her husband, did she open the door and enter with him. The ceiling was so low that he could not stand upright, it was as dark as night. The hut was roofed with grass so it smelled of wormwood. Bending, he stood his gun in a corner of the room, flung off his rucksack and sat down near the fireplace. He kept grinning not knowing what to say to her, for now the many stories he had so long intended to tell his wife were suddenly all forgotten. Presently they exchanged the words that people usually do when reunited after a long separation. Then he lay down on the straw-matted floor with his shoes on. His father was staying at a relative's in the next village to get acupuncture treatment for his asthma. Except for this all was well with his family. That was all the news he got from his wife. Why their old dilapidated house bare of furniture and household goods had changed into this still more miserable hovel, he did not need to ask.

"Why did you come? I thought you had gone for good...."

"I didn't say so. I said that I would come back when we had freed the homeland."

"But when you were leaving, you told me you did not know when you would be back...."

"Well, if I hadn't managed to come this time, I don't really know when I'd have been back."

"But why did you come?"

His colour rose in spite of himself. While staying at Liangkang with his unit he had suddenly been very homesick. He had longed to see his wife and his sick father. However, he did not dare to ask for leave to visit his home. So he had just fretted. One day Pak Hung Dok sounded him out in such a cunning way that he hinted at his homesickness. A few days later Pak Hung Dok came to him with a bundle, and asked him to pay a brief visit to his family. At first he flatly refused. He said a guerrilla was not supposed to go home for purely private reasons and he was not the same Choe Chil Song who used to carry a hoe in his rucksack. However, Pak Hung Dok made him go, telling him it was the company commander's order.

Choe Chil Song could not tell his wife this. Blinking his eyes under the dark eyebrows several times he said, "I was worried about father's illness." "And I wanted to see you" was on the tip of his tongue but he immediately suppressed these words.

After sunset, the village was shrouded in the gloomy shadow of the mountains. Without putting on his tunic Choe Chil Song went out to visit the straggling huts where he exchanged greetings with his neighbours. Then he came back and lay down again.

His wife was washing rice. She had smoothly combed hair, calm eyes that always looked down, and a round nose. He had been fascinated by her pretty face. He sprang up as if suddenly remembering something and opened his rucksack standing in the corner.

"I've brought you a present."

"How can a soldier bring a present?"

Her pouting lips just showed her dazzlingly white teeth.

"Guess what it is."

With his bulging rucksack in his lap, Choe Chil Song grinned so that his rather small eyes almost disappeared.

"How can I guess?"

"Come and look."

Pushing the rucksack towards his wife, he lay down on the floor again and watched her sideways. She took a parcel out of the rucksack and, leaning forward, exclaimed.

"Good Gracious!"

"What's the matter?"

"How wonderful!"

She produced the bundle of seaweed and some rice Pak Hung Dok had given him. Her hands shook as she held the rustling bundle. The moment the smell of seasoned seaweed saluted her nostrils, she looked almost intoxicated, shutting her eyes and shaking her head.

The gift showed eloquently how deeply her husband loved her though he had not said a word. Blushing to the nape of her neck, she quickly pushed aside the rucksack and went out with a water jar to calm herself.

The couple sat at the supper table facing each other. Choe Chil Song was served some foxtail millet in a bowl with a broken edge, a bean paste stew and a saucer of seasoned vegetable. That was all. He mixed the foxtail millet with cold water in a flat bowl and ate it hungrily with the stew, telling his wife incoherently many things he had seen or heard. The husband who had seldom spoken except to answer questions had become talkative and well-informed. Sometimes he gesticulated as he spoke, making her laugh or even cry.

After supper Ssanggama did her sewing by lamplight while he went on talking, lying on the floor, pillowing his head on his arm. He told her of his troubles with the *Communist Manifesto* when he had met his friend Pak Hung Dok before he joined the guerrilla army, of how he had been issued his uniform and gun, and of how during the long march across the foothills of Mt. Paekdu-san he had begun to learn the Korean alphabet. He said he could now read and write a little, betraying his pride despite an effort to be modest. He pointed out that in his unit there were several women and young boys, that everybody could cook and use a needle and that there were many characters among them, telling her their names and all about them. Then suddenly he realized how poor he was at speaking. His wife had listened with surprise and interest when he told her how he had been issued his uniform and gun, about the women guerrillas and about how he had become lettered. But she seemed to have little interest in the rest, and continued her work.

"Splendid, eh?"

"Quite. You are just like a child."

"What? Just a minute. What I've told you is only the beginning. You haven't heard the best part of my story yet."

"And you've become so restless."

"You know something? If you are too slow-moving, you can't lead a guerrilla's life. It's absolutely impossible to fight."

Ssanggama was again surprised. Even his speech had changed. He used big words as "absolutely" quite freely now, like the political worker from the district organization who had attended a recent gathering of the Women's Association. Sewing buttons on the old hemp jacket that her husband had left behind, Ssanggama kept smiling.

"Well, you really must listen to what I'm going to tell you now. Listen carefully."

Suddenly he sat up and asked her to bring a bowl of water which he drank in one gulp before starting his story about General Kum Song. He spoke fluently about the General who had shouldered responsibility for the Korean people's destiny, had led the revolution for a long time—since the age of 14. Last spring he had formed an armed guerrilla force which he was guiding now. And Choe Chil Song had had the honour of accompanying him as far as the Amnok-gang River. He described then how the General had been kind enough to bind a notebook for him to learn how to write and had even written letters

and figures for him to copy and how that night he had not managed to sleep a wink, shedding the tears of profound emotion.

Ssanggama stopped working and stared at her husband's face which seemed to her larger and prouder. As the night advanced the crickets began to chirp noisily. Choe Chil Song went on talking. This time, he spoke delightfully, comparing a hope-filled future with the past. He said he had rid himself for good of the bondslave's life that he would ascribe to fate, and stressed that as soon as the workers and peasants won their battle to liberate the homeland and build a socialist society free from exploitation and oppression, they would be masters of the country. Though now, because of the Japs, they lived in this grass-roofed hut with stars shining through the ceiling, he said, in the not too distant future they would be living under the happiest system in the world.

Gazing up at the wormwood leaves sticking out from the ceiling, Choe Chil Song led his spellbound wife this way and that, and she was enthralled by one fancy after another. He took her into the remote future picturing their happy, joyous lives. She stopped sewing and stared at him, fascinated; his simple-hearted wife was delighted and exalted, because she had faith in everything her husband told her. Choe Chil Song talked on and on far into the night. It was almost daybreak when they went to bed. Placing the flintlock beside his pillow he began to talk about the gun. He told her that each of the guns carried by the guerrillas contained a noble spirit, that some of them were soaked with the blood of comrades-in-arms. For the first time in his life he had pulled the trigger at the Japanese, fighting with Han Hung Su at Tunghua. Everything he had told her so far—liberation, independence, socialism, and a happy life—would be won by fighting with these guns. Then lying on his stomach with his pillow under his chest, he took hold of the flintlock, and as though demonstrating it to his wife, stroked the butt and pulled the trigger.

"What sort of gun is that?" Ssanggama asked abruptly.

"We call it a flintlock."

"A good gun?"

"Not so good. An old one."

"So you didn't fight well, did you? Because you were not given a good one."

"You are right. I couldn't fight well. I will have to get my-

self a good one," Choe Chil Song confessed frankly, looking rather embarrassed. He was most anxious to get one. He explained in a serious voice.

"General Kum Song put it like this: Where shall we get weapons? If we had money, we could buy them or make them. But the quickest way is to seize them from the enemy. He added that to get weapons, we must not be afraid of death. Nobody will give us guns. We ourselves must take them from the Japs, you see? As a member of the Women's Association, you must know that at least. Ha, ha, ha."

Choe Chil Song spoke in a dignified voice—never before had he surpassed his wife in eloquence.

At that moment the report of a gun was heard from afar that shook the tranquil night air.

"A gunshot."

Extremely nervous now, Ssanggama stared at her husband with wide-open eyes, but Choe Chil Song just dismissed it.

"Don't worry. Those swine can't do exactly what they want any longer."

Putting her hand to her breast, Ssanggama gave a sigh of relief and quickly put out the lamp.

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Next day refugees started streaming into the main village of Ssoksae Valley from early morning. Soon afterwards the "punitive force" approached the village firing their machine guns. According to the refugees, the Japanese were carrying out "punitive operations" against all the villages on the Tuman-gang River, burning houses and slaughtering people. Wave upon wave of women carrying babies on their backs and loads on their heads, able-bodied men carrying the wounded, and ox-carts full of children surged into the valley.

At a loss what to do, Choe Chil Song darted in and out of his hut. When he came in for a third time, his wife said.

"You must get away first."

For the last few hours she had been trying to get over sharp labour pains, her face white and twitching. She seemed to have recovered her breath but soon started groaning again. Jagun-

nyo's mother came. She was carrying a bundle on her head and clutching the hand of her four-year-old daughter.

"The Japs are here. The Japs. Don't you know it?"

Choe Chil Song rushed out of the door and told her that his wife had suddenly been taken ill.

"My God, she's giving birth now of all times?" Jagunnyo's mother cried in despair, putting down the bundle and entering the hut.

"I'll carry her on my back."

"Tut, tut. Are you crazy, man?"

"The enemy's coming."

"Take it easy right now."

Choe Chil Song ran out and looked at the entrance to the village. The masses of refugees were scattering over the millet field. The "punitive force" were firing their machine guns at them. The village began to burn. Flames shot up into the sky and the valley was heavy with the dark clouds of smoke blown forward by the south wind. Piercing cries were heard from all directions.

Choe Chil Song who had been standing with pursed lips and trembling fists rushed down along the range of the mountain. His darting figure with the flintlock was seen appearing and disappearing on the mountainside. He ran down to the familiar end of the mountain range. It occurred to him that though he was alone, with a flintlock he could hit as many enemies as he wanted if he occupied a good vantage point. He resolved to show his marksmanship. Like a tiger he flew down to one of the rocks that stood on either side of the village entrance like side posts. He lay down on his stomach in a crevice of the rock. He loaded his gun with powder and a ball, ignited it and aimed at the middle of a large pack of Japanese firing at the millet field from the roadside. The gun recoiled at his shoulder and emitted a flame from its muzzle. As a roaring sound rent his ears, one of the Japanese collapsed on the slope.

"Come on, you dogs. I'll knock the hell out of you."

Gasping, he reloaded his gun. When he had hit the "punitive force" with Han Hung Su the other day, he had been frightened and confused, though God knows why, but now he felt quite composed.

At that moment gunshots rang out from somewhere nearby, sporadically at first but, later, with increasing frequency. Choe Chil Song fired his gun again and looked round. Sudden-

ly, on a slope just below he saw 40 to 50 people in khaki uniforms.

"Why, isn't that the guerrillas?" he asked himself.

Holding the gun, he looked down again. They were indeed guerrillas, there was no doubt about it.

"Fine. Now we'll get you down, you Jap bastards."

In high spirits, he loaded his gun again.

On orders from headquarters the Yenchi Company under Choe Gi Gap's command had rushed to this spot and gone into action right away. Headquarters had decided to carry out the first phase of the winter operation at Ssoksae Valley. According to their operational plan, the main guerrilla force was to leave Liangkang, go down along the Tuman-gang River and join the Yenchi Company near Ssoksae Valley to wipe out the elite of the "Chientao Expeditionary Force" moving northwards.

Comrade Kum Song attached the utmost importance to this battle, in the light of the guerrillas' coming winter campaign. Because the guerrillas were going into their first large-scale battle, because it was to be a coordinated operation by guerrilla units from different areas, and also because the "Chientao Expeditionary Force" which had crawled in, boastfully calling itself part of the "invincible Imperial Army" must be frustrated at its first step. For this would have a vital bearing on the guerrillas' future operations; it would invigorate the people and convince them that the enemy could be hit any time by surprise.

As soon as the guerrillas provided covering fire the refugees seized the opportunity and began to make their way to the mountainside through Spring Valley. In high spirits, Choe Chil Song moved in the direction of Deer Rock where he could get a better view of the enemy. Lying flat here at the edge of the mountain range fifteen or sixteen guerrillas, in twos or threes, were shooting at exposed targets, making the most of their scarce ammunition. Nearly every shot told.

Those who had no guns used stones as missiles or rolled down rocks to stop the enemy from crawling up. The enemy force was obviously relying on numerical superiority, however. Half of them were fighting the guerrillas, while the other half headed for the village according to plan. Around noon the front village was completely enveloped in flames, and the Japanese advanced to the middle village and Spring Valley.

Dodging the bullets with great agility Choe Chil Song car-

ried rocks in his arms and pushed them down. Some of them rolled down intact, others split into thousands of splinters, which cut into the attackers. Those on their way up turned and fled, often to be hit by guerrilla bullets while fleeing.

Towards evening the situation turned decisively against the guerrillas. Few in number, their positions had become exposed and, worse still, they were almost out of ammunition. Apparently the "punitive force" had been waiting for this; as the guerrillas' fire became intermittent, they started to advance with greater tenacity. Some of them went on firing at the hill while others committed brutalities right and left at the middle village. Unfortunately, the stream ran through the village and upstream, there was a steep hill. A large number of civilians who had taken refuge here were in difficulties now because there was no way back. Most of them were from the Yenchi area, the rest from other places.

The guerrillas were making a desperate effort to help the people escape through Spring Valley into the mountains. With a meagre supply of bullets, with rocks and stones, they were trying hard to hold the enemy back. Having realized this disadvantage, the people now in the middle village were resolved to resist the enemy at the risk of their lives. With stones, spears and sticks in hand they were ready to fight to their last breath, standing with their backs to the children, women and old people.

The teacher Paek Gwang Myong with his strong silver-rimmed spectacles darted out of the school and called to the children to follow. More than 30 boys and girls dashed out of the two log cabins, each with three rooms. He ran behind one of the buildings and shouted to Jong Ok.

"Come out quick. The Japs are coming this way. Hurry."

Though of poor health caused by consumption, he had become surprisingly agile. Jong Ok, with bobbed hair, in a white jacket and black skirt, flung open the door and ran out. Last month they had met at Pisok Street some 50 *ri* away after their visit to Yungping. The girl had never given up her efforts to educate the children and had finally succeeded in bringing Paek Gwang Myong here. He was on his way up north to evade the "punitive force" but, after meeting Jong Ok had settled here in Ssoksae Valley which seemed to him to be reasonably safe.

"You must get out of here with the children." Paek Gwang Myong's face was as white as a sheet.

"I understand."

She immediately disappeared behind the school. Suddenly it occurred to him that he must not show any sign of fear in front of his pupils. He walked to a corner of the yard, and raising his face with its silver-rimmed spectacles called out:

"Boys and girls! Look at the top of the hill. The guerrilla uncles have come. They are hitting the Japanese. Now sing a song."

The teacher's dignified shouts encouraged the children.

"Our guerrillas!"

The school boys and girls gave exclamations of joy.

Chojjae, who had a rather long neck and black eyes, blew the bugle. And Sang Hun who was a little taller than he sang the first verse to lead the chorus.

*Let's go out to a decisive battle,
To a guerrilla struggle
Firmly holding arms in hand....*

Bullets whined through the walls of the school buildings. The children, rucksacks on their backs, were singing in chorus, facing the crest of the hill. Standing in the middle of the yard Paek Gwang Myong moved a doleful gaze from the hilltop to the children. He looked even shabbier than usual, with the collar of his single-breasted cotton coat turned up. Now there was no way out, he decided. In a few minutes, those blackguards, the "punitive force", would do as they had reportedly done at Big Valley last spring, would drive their bayonets into the chests of his children or throw them into burning houses. With an intellectual premonition that he was going to meet his death, he made a pathetic resolve. He instructed the children not to gather in one place, but to make for Spring Valley in groups. Then carrying a flintlock he had never handled before, he hurried past several log cabins and turned off a corner and lay flat.

Meanwhile, Kim Jong Ok went into one of the school buildings and asked a woman named Haeng Gum not to allow the children to disperse unless she had orders, and brought out the sick children covered in blankets.

"Wait a minute, Comrade Jong Ok."

Paek Gwang Myong came back to the yard, and choosing some of the older children told them to carry the sick children in Jong Ok's charge on their back across the stream. The

members of the Children's Corps ran into the school building and came out, each carrying a little one in their arms. They were only a few years older but they had been well trained in the Children's Corps and would fulfil their task.

It was too late, however. The "punitive troops" began to fire at the village, crossing the water. Whenever they spotted a figure outside, they showered it with bullets. Holding a child in her arms and stamping her feet, Jong Ok, frustrated, cursed the enemy. The children fixed their frightened eyes on Paek Gwang Myong's face, eagerly waiting for him to give some encouraging instructions. But their teacher closed his eyes, grinding his teeth. His ghastly thin body trembled.

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Comrade Kum Song climbed up to the crown of the hill behind Spring Valley. He looked down at the village clouded with smoke and from which he could hear the shrieks of children. He pulled out his pistol and rushed down the hillside. He stood on a rock and watched his men deploying to their respective positions for action.

Preparing for this battle he had told his commanding personnel that they should remember that the enemy forces were confident of their numerical strength and that they had never yet met any resistance from the Korean people. Therefore, he said, the enemy might be arrogant and outrageous, but once they were really hit, they would be scared. So, if we drove them into the ravine and made a concentrated attack, the "invincible Imperial Army" troops would be smashed. This had encouraged the commanders. On the other hand, he warned that if this arrogant and outrageous "Chientao Expeditionary Force" was not dealt a crushing blow, the newly-formed guerrilla forces and their bases would be wiped out. The enemy was now aiming to do just that and had thrown in sufficient forces to achieve this. Like all other aggressors, once the Japanese knew that the other side was weak, their arrogance and ferocity would multiply. The Korean people were trusting their destiny to the guerrilla army and, at this grim juncture, were watching how their sons and daughters would fight. Pointing out that

the fate of the revolution hinged on this battle, Comrade Kum Song said that for the present the enemy was playing into our hands and crawling into the narrow ravine which was disadvantageous to him.

Comrade Kum Song quickly moved the local guerrillas under Choe Gi Gap's command to the rear of the middle village and dispatched Chon Gwang Sik to the enemy's flank to attack him from there. To the entrance to Spring Valley, the most vital spot, he sent Han Hung Su.

Comrade Kum Song brought down his pistol which had been raised over his shoulder, and pulled the trigger. Following this signal, firing started at all four points, and battle cries could be heard here and there.

The guerrillas sent rocks down the slopes, and raised great cries. Gunshots and battle cries shook narrow Ssoksae Valley.

From the foot of the hill, Pyon In Chol, the shorty, came rushing up. As soon as the battle had begun, he had been sent on a liaison mission to the right range where Han Hung Su was. In great excitement, he had reported on a thrilling battle scene, screwing up his eyes as bright as jewels. In fact, all the guerrillas were unusually excited. Ever since they joined the guerrilla army they had held shooting practice every day, even during their rest hours, and had anxiously awaited the day when they could use their skill. Now suddenly came this large-scale battle.

"Their morale is high. They pull their triggers, and there are shouts of confirmation for every hit. Some of them are rolling down rocks and destroying Japs in whole batches."

Pyon In Chol described what he had witnessed and conveyed the company commander's report.

The battle became fiercer and dragged out. Bullets whined past nearby with strong metallic sounds. The two bodyguards who had stood on either side of Comrade Kum Song rushed to him and advised him to move away quickly because the enemy had obviously spotted the guerrilla command post.

"Never mind, never mind. The enemy are trying to flee. Look at that. That man in front has turned round, and is dilly-dallying, you see?"

His loud laughter echoed over the hill. Having led the battle to a decisive victory, he was already seeing the vanqui-

shed enemy. At first the enemy soldiers attacked furiously. Then their ferocity sagged and they shot blindly. They tried to fight on against the guerrillas but soon realized that this would be sheer recklessness. They could take no action against guerrillas scattered on the rugged mountain ranges, while the guerrillas were hitting one of them with every shot.

Comrade Kum Song ordered a concentrated attack on the enemy's command post on the opposite side of the stream. The Japanese, who had appeared in an unsheltered area pursuing the civilians, were disconcerted. Their fire became more and more sporadic and weak. Comrade Kum Song sent an orderly to instruct his troops to go on hammering at the enemy, not to give him a moment's respite.

A few enemy troops turned on their heels and then the unit about the size of a company, which had come up the embankment backed down. The guerrillas stuck to their jutting rock and kept on shooting. They shouted slogans:

"Down with Japanese imperialism!"

"Revenge against the Japs who slaughtered our parents and our brothers!"

Reports from Chon Gwang Sik and Company Two kept Comrade Kum Song informed of the situation.

With their command post hit hard, the "punitive force" had started to retreat. Those who had waded across the stream in front of the village went back. Guerrillas' bullets were scoring accurate hits on enemy soldiers in midstream where there was no cover.

From down below Yong Suk was darting up the hillside. On his arrival here, the Comrade Commander had sent her to look for Choe Chil Song. The sweat burst through the pores of her chin in tiny beads and her face was flushing. She stood in front of the Comrade Commander and reported:

"Comrade Choe Chil Song was not at home. I was told he had gone out with a gun...."

She was so out of breath that she could not finish the last sentence. The Comrade Commander smiled and advised her to take her time. But she was still out of breath; she must give him the urgent news. She recovered her breath after a few seconds, before resuming her report.

"Comrade Choe Chil Song's wife is in the throes of childbirth."

"The throes of childbirth?"

He was stunned to hear it and then grinned.

"Then why did you come back? You said Comrade Choe wasn't at home."

Yong Suk mumbled, unable to find an answer.

A moment later, he asked her where Choe Chil Song's house was. Blinking her double eyelids, Yong Suk pointed to a spot where several huts were huddled together.

"Go back and look after the mother."

Yong Suk had something on the tip of her tongue but saluted and whirled round to run down. With a grave expression he looked after her for a few seconds. He had a strong urge to do something for this child born in the flames of battle. Again he received reports from different posts, and after a few moments of reflection, he called Pyon In Chol and said in a firm voice.

"You see that group of huts down there? One of them is Comrade Choe Chil Song's. Go and tell each company: Don't let the enemy overrun the rise in front of those huts, whatever happens."

Pyon In Chol flew down the hill like an arrow.

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Choe Chil Song had been fighting with the Yenchi Company. On hearing the news that his headquarters had reached the hill, he jumped for joy. His face, blackened with grime, was beaming. In high spirits, he described how splendid his unit was and declared that everything would be all right now. Members of the Yenchi Company shouted in delight on hearing Choe Chil Song, who was under the personal command of the Comrade Commander. When the company began to move behind the middle village on orders from the command post, Choe Chil Song dropped out.

With flintlock on his shoulder, he clambered up to the top of a cliff when the battle was at its height. Watching the situation from a crevice, he suddenly had a fantastic idea; he wanted to seize a good gun and show it to his friends. Giving himself no time to think, he darted through the *tarae* vines as far as the

bank of the stream. There, he lay flat in the grass and after watching for a few moments, started to crawl forward. In a moment he would reach the waterside where the Japanese were lying on their stomachs, firing at the village. He would have to jump one of the Japs in a flash, straddle him and finish him off like a chicken. What happened after that he did not care. Let fate decide. Once he'd grabbed the gun, he wouldn't let it go. Not even if his throat was cut.

Choe Chil Song crawled out towards a wormwood bush where a khaki-uniformed Japanese soldier was firing, lying on his stomach, his legs spread-eagled. When he was still some 30 metres from his target, there was a sudden change in the battle situation. He did not know why, but the change was radical. The enemy was thrown into sudden confusion and started to retreat. Our firing was so fierce and accurate that the enemy troops were running helter-skelter, not knowing which way to go. It was a golden opportunity. He would just grab any one of the scared Japs and throw him over, and that would do. A cold smile hovering round his lips, he was creeping towards the waterside overgrown with wormwood bushes when he saw a dead enemy soldier lying on the sand, his rifle still slung across his shoulder. He did not expect fortune to smile on him so quickly. Like a starved man eyeing a bowl of rice, he sprang up throwing caution to the wind and dashed through a puddle of water to the body, his hands outstretched. He was about to grab the gun, when the Japanese whom he had thought dead suddenly fired, still lying motionless on the ground. This fellow had been one of the last to retreat from the village. As he came into the open, he had been so frightened by our accurate firing that he had dropped to the ground to watch developments, pretending to be dead.

Choe Chil Song had no time to think that this enemy bullet might well have killed him then and there. In a flash, he was astride the enemy's back, gripping the rifle butt. The Jap, a superbly powerful man, threw off the attacker and himself got astride of Choe. A fist was driven into his face. Choe felt sparks flying in his eyes and his heart being crushed to pulp. He had had exactly the same feeling a few years ago; one day when the stone floor of the landlord's house was under repair, he had gone underneath it, and it had caved in on him. Choe opened his mouth wide to let out a yell, striking the enemy's chest and straightened himself up with all his might. The two

bodies got to their feet in the same posture. Holding up the upper part of his body, the Japanese dealt another powerful blow at Choe's lower jaw. Choe Chil Song's head swung helplessly from side to side; he was dizzy and numb to his finger tips. The Japanese seemed to be trying to kill the Korean youth by aiming at his last vulnerable spot. He let out a cry as he struck Choe's chest. Choe Chil Song fell forward with a stifled yell. Like a victor the Jap grinned and was about to run for it. At that moment Choe Chil Song got a grip on his throat with his huge hands and smashed into his chest with his forehead. The Jap collapsed.

"Come on, you bastard. Let's see which will win, a pair of straw sandals or a pair of wooden clogs. Oh, hell!" (Here a pair of sandals means a Korean and a pair of wooden clogs a Japanese—Tr.).

Choe Chil Song strangled the Japanese with his bare hands. The black stocky hands mercilessly throttled the thick white neck. It resisted the iron grip several times before Choe Chil Song felt a rattling sound inside the throat like a funnel sucking water and the Japanese soldier's wriggling legs spread out and moved no more.

"You thought you could slip through the hands of the revolution?"

Having assured himself there would be no resistance, Choe Chil Song spat out a mouthful of sand and picked up the rifle lying on the grass.

"So you came over here from across the sea to give me this as a present, eh? You damned Jap!"

He wiped the dirt off the rifle butt with the palm of his hand, spat again and turned on his heels.

His feet pricked on the waterside, which made him realize he was bare-footed. He couldn't bear to step on bushes or stones which hurt the soles of his feet. He raised his begrimed face and gazed round. He was astonished at the scene of carnage. The trampled grass was covered with dust and scattered with corpses. Puddles were crimson with blood. Each gust of wind carried the smell of blood. A bluish cloud of smoke was rising from a grassy plot not far away; something must still be burning. On a rise beside some wormwood stalks, a dead Jap lay spread-eagled, his mouth wide open. He looked young, around 22. As far as the eye could see the ground was littered with empty cartridge cases and pock-marked with ugly

footsteps. Choe Chil Song's full, brick-coloured lips opened slowly and he broke into laughter, baring his front teeth. He picked up the rifle he had just taken and walked off. He limped on, avoiding the corpses. Spotting a mud-smeared Japanese helmet, he gave it a kick. It rolled along like a gourd and landed in a puddle. It scared some frogs and they jumped into the water. After a short while he paused. He caught sight of a yellow, shiny leather field satchel. With a fixed look in his eyes he bent down to pick it up. He checked it, but it contained nothing but a strong smell of soap. Someone must have thrown it away. He untwisted the strap and slung it across his shoulder.

He walked for a good while before making another halt. There was a shoe on the grass. A new leather shoe. There was another a couple of paces ahead beside a bespectacled man lying dead, spread out like an X. Judging from his gorgeous civilian tie, he must be an interpreter or something of the sort. Choe Chil Song looked from the shoes to his bare feet a couple of times, picked up the shoe and measured it against his foot. He put it on. It was a good fit. Putting his head on one side, he stamped his feet.

"Not bad. Be it a pheasant or a chick, I don't care. Better than nothing."

On arriving at the mountain slope, he bent down, took a handful of dirt at the roadside and started smearing the shoes. He did not like the shine. Now the shoes were dirty all over. They looked darkish and he thought he could wear them. Then he hurried up the mountain, over stones and grass.

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Having repulsed the enemy for the time being, the guerrillas went to the aid of the villagers.

According to the report of Cha Gi Yong, who had made an inspection of the middle village, there were still scores of people there, besides the children with Kim Jong Ok and Paek Gwang Myong.

Comrade Kum Song, accompanied by some of the combatants, went down into the village. Our surprise attack had

forced the enemy to withdraw—but only temporarily. Therefore, the village had to be evacuated quickly.

Comrade Kum Song hurried down the steep slope, leading a dozen or so guerrillas. As they entered the village the enemy began shooting as he had expected. The old folk and children who had stayed there again raised a hubbub. The guerrillas quickly took them on their backs across the water. The upper reaches of the stream behind the village were comparatively safe for wading but the stream was swift-flowing. The only place they could cross was a wide shoal to the west. Unfortunately, however, this place was exposed to the enemy troops deployed at the village entrance, and the refugees had to be got across without delay. The people crowded on the bank of the stream.

Comrade Kum Song sternly instructed his bodyguards.

"Don't just follow me. Carry those children across the stream."

Soon he had made two journeys across the water, and again he went into the village. He had inspected the village and was about to leave for the last time, when he found a girl with bobbed hair on the embankment, with three little children. It was Kim Jong Ok. She had a five-year-old on her back, and was holding eight-year-old Gum Suk and her sister, Jong Sun, by the hand. She was just about to enter the water. Comrade Kum Song dashed over to them, took Gum Suk and Jong Sun in his arms and waded into the water. Bullets rained over the stream. The mossy bottom was very slippery and the rapid water was chest-high. However, he held the two little ones above the water and waded forward step by step. The two bodyguards approached him and tried to take the children.

"There are more behind," he said. He meant them to carry Jong Ok and the child she was holding on her back. As he waded through the torrent, bullets whizzed by and splashed water on either side of him. The villagers who had crossed the stream gave anxious cries on the bank.

"My God. What shall we do? Oh...."

Dangerous moments followed. The guerrillas jumped into the water and pulled out the last refugee. The fierce shooting went on for another hour before dusk fell.

In a secluded spot beyond reach of enemy bullets, Comrade Kum Song helped the children take off their clothes, rinsed

them in clear water and washed their muddy faces. With his friends Chojjae had squeezed water out of his clothes himself and put them on. He instantly recognized the General and rushed to his sister. She had had such a tough time that she sat on the grass beyond a rock with tearful eyes, forgetting to rinse her muddy clothes.

"Sis, General Kum Song's there, you know him; the other day we...."

Jong Ok turned round.

"What?"

She could not believe what she had heard in her confusion, and firmly held her brother's shoulders with both hands as if resolved not to let him escape.

"What were you saying just now?"

"There's General Kum Song over there. We met him on the riverside after the 'punitive operation', didn't we? He asked me my name then, and checked my catapult."

Having confirmed what Chojjae had said, Jong Ok jumped to her feet, straightened her jacket still dripping with water, and went forward. She had thought it was an ordinary guerilla who had helped her carry the children across the stream, had never dreamt it could be the General himself.

As Comrade Kum Song straightened himself after wringing out the clothes and putting them back on Gum Suk, Jong Ok stepped forward and bowed her head.

"How do you do, General? I...."

"Who could this be?! Aren't you Jong Ok?"

She stood motionless, with bowed head. Then Chojjae came and bowed briskly. Comrade Kum Song touched his cheeks with both hands.

"Why, hello Chojjae, my boy," he shouted, opening his arms and hugging him. "So you are here."

The boy's thin hands tightly clasped the General's neck and shook. Comrade Kum Song closed his eyes. Chojjae's sister sewing a torn jacket, head bent, Gum Suk with her long eyelashes and round face, a woman who lifted up her face, blowing at the fire, the smiling children waving dandelions, the puddles as red as blood—all these things flashed before his eyes.

Presently he embraced Gum Suk just as he had done Chojjae and then turned to Jong Ok. Deeply moved she was

sobbing, covering her face with both hands. She sobbed like a small child, her shoulders heaving, though she seldom shed tears whatever the adversity.

"Don't cry. A platoon leader must not cry. Now stop. It's dark already."

Placing his hand on Jong Ok's shoulder, he uttered many comforting words. He also asked her how she had been getting along, how she had got here, how many children she was taking care of, whether any of them were sick, what food they had been eating. She answered each of his kind inquiries, and she said that she had no more worries now. They went up the mountainside, he taking Chojjae and Gum Suk by the hand and Jong Ok carrying Jong Sun on her back.

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Axe in hand Comrade Kum Song entered a thicket. There were plenty of trees but for a moment he paused before making a choice. Straight, smooth larches were easy to fell but they were too thorny and resinous and would not be suitable for a children's hut. He moved deeper into the thicket, pushing his way through the undergrowth. He paused where aspens and birches grew close together, looking for suitable trees. However, he did not like them either, because they had too many branches and knots. Meanwhile, on the opposite side of the valley the two bodyguards and Aunt Haeng Gum were cutting down trees at random, using axes and sickles and beginning to build a hut. After inspecting the thicket Comrade Kum Song took off his tunic and went down to a ravine overgrown with ash trees. Jong Ok followed him but by the time she had reached the spot, he had already felled a thick ash tree. As he raised the axe and brought it down diagonally, the sound rang through the thicket, and the hard bark was chipped off to reveal the white wood. After a few blows the ground was littered with white chips and the straight trunk, leaning to one side, fell with a snap. He cut down one tree after another. Jong Ok hated to see him doing this, and went to his side and suggested in a low voice.

"I'll do it, General."

"Oh, you've come. Why are you here? Why aren't you with the children?"

Rolling up his shirt sleeves which had slipped down, he looked over his shoulder.

"Army brothers have cut down a lot of larches up there. And they have brought pine branches for roofing...."

"Have they? These are better than larches. But you shouldn't leave the children. There are lots of prickly thorns in the thicket. And you have to be careful of the cliffs too. Go back. I will fell a few more and then come."

She knew from his tone of voice that it would be impossible to tear him from the work, so she tried to help him by lopping off the branches with a sickle.

"Go back quick."

"We can prepare a place for the children ourselves, General."

Jong Ok would not leave, continuing to lop off branches from the felled tree. After meeting her on the river bank beyond Kaduk-ryong Pass he had come to know her tenacity, exactness and promptness. And that day he found that she was not an ordinary type of girl. She was only 16, but the way she carried out her assignments and her way of thinking revealed that she was as mature as any woman organizer.

Darkness descended on the thicket and the trees were hardly discernible. Having cut down the trees, he trimmed them to the right length, tied them in twos or threes on both ends with *tarae* vines and carried them on his shoulder.

"Yo-Ho!"

Mustering his strength, he stepped over a rock and climbed up the slope vigorously. Jong Ok picked out a thick log, dragged it upwards and across the hill.

The bodyguards had chosen a place they thought suitable and built a hut with the trees they had brought in. The top was covered with pine branches and the bottom was spread with dry grass. Pyon In Chol spotted the Comrade Commander and wanted to help him unload but the logs were already on the ground.

The Comrade Commander inspected the hut and reflected for a few moments before asking Pyon In Chol where he could get a shovel.

"This is not a good place for the children because of the

slope. Let's build another one over there. Besides, I don't like these larches."

Pyon In Chol could not find a word to say and cast a confused look at Jong Ok.

"This will be all right, General. This is fine," insisted Jong Ok, stepping forward to the General. The army brothers had worked hard to build it and it would be good enough to give shelter from the dew at night, she thought.

"General, the children have already been here and are happy. They are all old enough to walk now. I'll take care of them."

Jong Ok tried her best to make him drop the idea of building another hut.

"No. Let's put up a new one. This one will do for the grown-ups. Let Comrade Pyon and others use this. Bring me a shovel."

On being handed the shovel he went down to a rise on the right and chose a nice flat spot. All the ash trees he had cut were brought up in three or four batches, and used for posts for a new hut.

"Comrade Jong Ok, how do you like this? Better than the one over there?"

"It's marvelous. We can live in here."

"All right, then. We cannot let those little orphans sleep just anywhere, can we? If we weren't able, that would be another matter. But we should not expose them to the dew and make them walk a hard road even for a night. I think this is much better than those over there. And they can walk here easily because the ground is flat. Children have a habit of clinging to things, so sticky or knotty logs are no good for them. Well, what about their supper?"

"We are cooking it there."

Jong Ok pointed to the foot of the mound where Aunt Haeng Gum was making a fire under a pot placed between two stones. He made the rounds of the hut, putting finishing touches where necessary, and then went inside to firm up the grass-covered ground. He touched every corner to see whether it would be hard to sit down or whether there was anything sticking up. Then he spread blankets and brought in the children in his arms.

Outside, he stopped to think for a few seconds, then made a lamp out of an ink bottle and lit it. Only then was he content.

He went down to the well and washed his hands in the clear water Jong Ok ladled up, and then sat on a rock for the sweat to dry.

"Comrade Jong Ok, you stay here for the night, and tomorrow we'll build a new hut or go down to the village. The Japanese have deprived those children of too many things. However, the revolution must reclaim all they have lost and must provide them with everything their parents wanted for them. You understand what I mean?"

He wiped his hands on a handkerchief and cast his eyes over the bonfires which now virtually covered the valley side. As if speaking to himself, he continued.

"At present those children do not even have a proper place to sleep. But in the future, they must be provided with the most precious things, the best things in the world. Comrade Jong Ok!"

He called her, looking at her over his shoulder. She was standing, the end of her jacket string held between her lips.

"Take good care of them, won't you? What sort of children are they? As you know, they escaped from a sea of flames, they have been rescued out of a sea of blood. They are unhappy children. But feeling sorry for them just because they are unhappy is not enough. They are the future masters of our country. We are fighting and we are shedding our blood today to guarantee them a happy future. We can't just give in to humiliation, hunger and insult; that's why we are fighting. Even if we suffer great torments, even if we die, we must see to it that they do not become a people without a country. Once you understand this well, you will know how you must feed them, put them to bed and talk to them.

"Do you understand, Comrade Jong Ok? Let's go up. I'm afraid supper is late already."

Three or four children were seated by the fireside and Jong Ok, with her jacket sleeves rolled up, was ladling thick hot porridge out of the cooking pot.

"Now, all of you, get up. You must eat your supper. Yong Nam and Un Sik, get up quick."

Only when Jong Ok had shouted a few more times and Aunt Haeng Gum aroused them, did all the children get up. Accustomed to an organized life, they were fully awake by the time they sat around the fire. Their eyes twinkled like morning stars. Only two were still nodding their heads and dozing. The

porridge bowls were put on a piece of cloth spread on the ground. Steam was rising from the porridge made of bean flour and mountain greens. As soon as everybody had their bowl, the elder ones started eating ravenously.

Comrade Kum Song sat by the fire, staring at the coarse food and the children eating it. When his eyes alighted on Un Sil, the youngest girl, still drowsing, he put her on his lap and took her porridge bowl.

"Come on. Wake up, young lady. Eat your supper."

The five-year-old Un Sil, in a ridiculously short hemp skirt, was still nodding on his lap.

"Drink some water first, and wake up."

He poured water from a large brass bowl and helped her with a spoon. Half-asleep, Un Sil was nevertheless conscious that she was being fed and opened her mouth. His face expressionless, he silently kept feeding the child.

No sooner had she taken the last spoonful, than she closed her eyes and was fast asleep. He laid the girl on his lap, took off his tunic and covered her with it. As he stroked her head and chest, Un Sil opened her eyes once to look up, and was instantly asleep again, breathing regularly.

After supper Jong Ok went into the hut and helped the children get ready for bed. When she came out a half moon was sailing through the branches. Aspens moved their boughs up and down in the breeze and cast their mottled shadows on the ground.

"Put down Un Sil, General."

"Leave her alone. She is not quite fast asleep yet. This girl should have been sleeping in her mother's arms, instead of sleeping in a thicket under the moon."

Jong Ok felt a quiver in his voice. She said nothing and crouched by the bonfire, taking care of it. The sleeping girl gave a start and, raising her arm, tried to get up. The great shock she had experienced during the day when she heard the gunshots had not subsided. He put her arm underneath his coat, patted her and sang a lullaby.

Sleep, sleep, my child, sleep....

The singing soon lulled Un Sil, and Jong Ok sat wrapped in deep thought. The flickering flames reminded her of the past. She saw her father and mother's faces, Chojjae's dark face

covered with ash and the tearful faces of Un Sil and Yong Nam. She had brought a dozen orphans on a creaking ox-cart from Big Valley a hundred *ri* along the river, crossed Kaduk-ryong Pass and gone down to Chang Village where she met Mr. Paek, and then down south or up to the north along Wangching and Yenchu to avoid the "punitive forces". She had walked and walked, days and nights. The wheels of the cart swaying freely on the loose shafts, villages in heavy clouds of smoke, children in rags and hungry infants.... And she herself had hustled about anxiously above all to save their lives.

Waking from her reminiscences, Jong Ok turned round and looked at the sleeping children. They were all travelling in dreams.

"Have a good sleep, little ones. And don't cry. For if you weep, I shall want to cry, too. You are not alone. The General is embracing you and looking after you. You hear me? The General is singing a lullaby now to put you to sleep. Sleep, children. And grow big."

Jong Ok patted her eyes with her jacket sleeve and looked at the sleeping children. She wanted to weep, though she did not know why.

Sleep, sleep, my child, sleep....

The lullaby was heard again. The whole world seemed to be asleep. At last Jong Ok too closed her eyes, her chin on her knees.

Now the country is independent. The streets are crowded with people shouting hurrah, and waving. There are many children. All of them are wearing rainbow-coloured jackets and good leather shoes. They are carrying bunches of flowers. From yonder the General is approaching, with a smile and open arms. There are shouts of joy. Jong Ok must run to him but however hard she tries her feet won't move. With might and main she carries her feet and shouts hurrah.

Seeing her twisting about and moaning and murmuring in her dream, Comrade Kum Song grinned and called her softly.

"Comrade Jong Ok!"

She was startled. She raised her face and looked round. The scene of delight was gone and all she could see was the dancing flames.

"You look tired. Go in and sleep."

"No, I'm not tired."

Jong Ok piled some chips of wood on the fire and smiled, curling her upper lip.

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Bonfires were burning. People were scattered all over the ravines; they had built fires, were cooking food or warming themselves around them. Blue clouds of smoke crept down leisurely and carefully, towards the village where tranquility was now being restored as darkness fell.

Housewives were soothing their babies quietly or moving backwards and forwards to prepare something to eat, while the men busied themselves felling trees and building shelters. Shouting voices were heard here and there, calling members of the family and, occasionally, the chatter of children. Here in this remote valley where only the odd woodman came to fell wood—a few times a year—a fantastic scene had developed in the last 24 hours.

The guerrillas helped the people put up shelters.

Having made sure that all the children under Jong Ok's care were asleep, Comrade Kum Song was talking with Choe Gi Gap, seated on the grass. Choe Gi Gap briefed him on all he had done since his departure from Small Plot, Liangkiang, and made a detailed report on that day's action. While listening to Choe Gi Gap, he had been thinking about what should be done to stabilize the people's life here. The chips of larches sputtered and shot up flames. As the campfire brightened, Comrade Kum Song picked some little nuts from the jutting branch of a toothache tree and rolled them on the palm of his hand. A strong fragrance came from the round nuts which were already ripe.

"Comrade Li Chol Gun has secured as wide an area as you have. And his messenger tells us, it will soon be broadened, as vast as several counties put together. Well, what are you going to do? Since you have formed a base, you must quickly build it up into a strong fortress, mustn't you? The really vital thing, particularly in the light of the present situation

here in Ssoksae Valley, is to stabilize the lives of the inhabitants. How can it be done?"

Comrade Kum Song looked smiling at Choe Gi Gap who sat sideways in an awkward position to hide a tear in his sleeve. Choe Gi Gap, who was by nature cheerful, now looked unusually calm. He thought for a few moments, lowering his slanting eyes before he spoke.

"I'm at a loss what to do. Before, we controlled a few villages. But now the area has grown so large so quickly that I don't know what to do or how. The population has increased enormously in this vast area, and our armed forces are too small to protect it and on top of that, these 'punitive operations' will go on...."

"That's right. That's the point. I noticed today that you are poor at leading the masses. You must lead the people to act on orders as one man, but they are quite unorganized. You have done away with the police, district and township chiefs, the lackeys of the Japanese imperialist rulers, but you have no organization to guide the masses in a coordinated way. You have got an Anti-Imperialist League, a Young Communist League and a Women's Association but you have no machinery to unite them all. You won't be able to defend the base until you have solved that problem. Then you stabilize the people's lives and conduct warfare."

"Yes."

"Let's have a discussion with Ssoksae Valley comrades, instead of just talking this over between ourselves."

"I'll go and bring the chiefs of organizations."

"No, you needn't. We had better go to them. How about making a round of this place? Then we may grasp the people's mentality, too."

Comrade Kum Song stood up and walked ahead. As they went down the slope they heard a song from the thicket. Chon Gwang Sik had brought the villagers to watch a performance given by the guerrillas. They were standing round an enormous campfire, children, youths, women and old folk. It was well into the night but the people were excited, laughing and clapping their hands. Most of them had that day lost their shelter, their food and household goods and some had bandaged heads or arms. However, the guerrilla army had won the battle, and they felt neither sorrow or pain, nor a desire to sleep.

Chon Gwang Sik knew what the victory at Ssoksae Valley

meant better than anybody else, and he kept the performance going, running here and there, his arms upheld, and occasionally making political speeches to the audience. He called it a "Victors' Performance". There were solos, choruses and dances. Everyone displayed what talents they had. Pyon In Chol played a sentimental, doleful tune on his *tungso* flute.

Comrade Kum Song stood behind the old people and cast a satisfied look round the happy scene. A dance was in full swing. Pak Hung Dok was a superb dancer, and Cha Gi Yong was an excellent dancer, too, though he was lanky and used his arms in a rather comical way. Se Gol moved his shoulders exquisitely. He spread out his legs, skipping and jumping, and whirled round and round on one heel, nodding his head. Chin Bong Nam's movements were flexible and subtle. He looked very charming when he twisted himself and waved his arms. Pak Hung Dok played a dwarf. As he danced he tottered and suddenly dragged a young villager out of the audience into the dance. There was a burst of laughter and the clapping of hands shook the air over the valley.

"Bravo! Bravo!"

Women guerrillas joined in the dance. Myong Ok was nowhere to be seen, but Yong Suk and Hye Yong danced together. When they revolved like toys to the rhythmical beat of a drum, the skirts of their uniforms spread out like the ribs of a fan. Someone held up a torch. Their faces were flushed and their uniforms looked brighter.

Children came running, rubbing their sleepy eyes, and the women who had been boiling porridge watched the dance with gourd ladles in their hands. The place was agog as though a big festival was in progress and time and again there was laughter and cries of delight.

Chon Gwang Sik jumped into the circle of dancers and danced with outstretched arms. Taking a few steps forward on his toes and after several seconds of excited hesitation, swaying his shoulders from side to side, he whirled round and clapped his hands, lifting and bringing down his arms and tapping his feet on the ground.

With a broad smile on his face, Comrade Kum Song clapped his hands. When the performance was at its height, he went down to a hollow with Choe Gi Gap where the village cadres of Ssoksae Valley were gathered. He held consultations with the heads of branches of the Anti-Imperialist League,

Youth League, Women's Association and Peasants' Association on setting up a unified organization. He asked numerous questions about the living conditions of the population here. He also asked about the size of the liberated area, the inhabitants, the food situation, about what was being done for the sick and wounded, the number of children of school age and so on, and gave them good advice on every point.

When the meeting was over, he looked up for a while at the nocturnal sky bright with star dust and, suddenly rising to his feet, said out loud.

"Let's set it up. There must be no delay. Let's establish our new order on the ruins of the old. This is the only way to solve it all."

All of a sudden he was inspired; the long-cherished idea flashed across his mind and took concrete shape. Even Choe Gi Gap, who could guess his excitement better than anybody else, was not sure exactly what he had in mind. But he realized instinctively that something very important for the revolution had been put on the order of the day.

"Yes. A government. We must establish a government." He shouted again, pacing back and forth by the campfire.

"Let's wind up our meeting for today, Comrade Choe. We will meet again tomorrow."

But when everyone had gone, he was still pacing up and down in the same place, wrapped in deep thought.

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Under a larch tree where Company Three had settled, Pak Hung Dok was making quite a fuss.

"Why, look at this! Ha, ha, ha, ha. Ha, ha, ha."

Having gone round Choe Chil Song, Pak Hung Dok looked at him, amused, and yelled.

"Comrades, Comrade Choe Chil Song is back. This is really fantastic. Ha, ha, ha, ha."

The guerrillas who had just returned from the performance which had lasted far into the night came out and, in an instant, surrounded Choe Chil Song.

There were scores of them. Standing in the middle of the

circle he was bewildered and just walked round and round in confusion. As Pak Hung Dok had commented, his appearance was really a fantastic event in their life. And his features were quite shocking. He was in his uniform as before but had his flintlock on his right shoulder and on his left a shining 38-rifle. Also, across his shoulder was a leather strap from which a huge field satchel hung, and he was holding a big bundle wrapped in a piece of cloth. Choe Chil Song's return itself was already a big topic, and his appearance dumbfounded everyone. His face and behaviour were so serious, as usual, that they could not tease him. He was a reticent man who had never joked, and all the things he had been through in the last couple of days had bewildered him as though he had suddenly been pushed into the unknown. During the fighting he had heard of the arrival of his headquarters but the situation had not allowed him to look for its whereabouts, and even after the enemy's retreat and the sunset, he could not return because of trouble which had forced him to stay at home. Yong Suk who had been looking after his wife at his house told him about the arrival of his comrades-in-arms, and because of her insistence he had had to stay at home and only late at night had he come back here with Yong Suk.

Choe Chil Song exchanged greetings with his friends, the bundle in his hand, making signs and nodding his head. His face had turned purple because he felt as ashamed and sorry as if caught red-handed in some awful deed. Pak Hung Dok who had stood sniffing went up to Choe Chil Song, took the Japanese rifle off his shoulder, held it high with both hands and went round inside the ring to show it the way a magician shows his magic pot.

"If you pluck the pumpkin, you have to snatch the vines and all, as they say. Now, look at this gun. This is a brand-new one right out of the factory. It's well oiled. Do you know this man here swiped it just like this."

Leaning the gun against a rock Pak Hung Dok pretended to strangle himself, mimicked the panting sounds, and finally pretended to give up the gun and go limp. His gesticulation might not be accurate to the last detail but it was so vivid and graphic that his friends could imagine just how Choe Chil Song had got the gun. There was a general hubbub, and they clapped their hands and burst out laughing. Before the laughter had subsided, Pak Hung Dok told another story.

"Don't think that that is all, either. Now look at this. This is a field satchel. A Jap officer must have swaggered about with it slung across his shoulder. Well, that's that. Comrade Choe Chil Song says he will give me this as a present. Frankly speaking, I don't like this sort of thing, it's liable to be a nuisance. But how can I refuse a present from a comrade?"

Pak Hung Dok pulled the strap over his shoulder and perked up.

Thus he had taken possession of the satchel which would be very useful to him. Again his comrades broke out laughing, now realizing how their greedy quartermaster had used his wits. Pak Hung Dok was going to end it there for the moment when, unexpectedly, someone else exclaimed:

"Why, friend, look at the shoes you're wearing!"

Pak Hung Dok himself was taken aback. Choe Chil Song hid his feet in the grass in a flurry. The dew had washed off the mud and the tops of the shoes had regained their original shine.

"You really are a character, man."

Choe Chil Song explained that during his scuffle with the Japanese to seize his gun, his shoes had slipped off and he had picked up the pair he was wearing now on the waterside to cover his bare feet.

"I'm sure that that pair of shoes came off a running dog of a Jap in a white serge suit, wielding a walking cane. He was so scared he ran away without them."

"But it is better than going barefoot." Choe Chil Song protested.

"How can it be better? If it were, the owner would not have thrown them away. Smell them. They must have an awful bourgeois smell."

Se Gol looked at Choe Chil Song. Pulling a face, Choe Chil Song stayed seated on the grass.

"What's wrong with your shoes, Comrade Choe? Let me have a look."

"No, you needn't."

Choe Chil Song would not show his feet.

"Look at him in those shoes. Like a dandy. Ha, ha, ha, ha."

Se Gol was cantankerous enough to hold up Choe Chil Song's shoes.

"Gosh! As stubbly as the barrel of the dog owned by the Japanese taskmaster at the Limyongsu felling ground."

Choe Chil Song had been ill at ease since he was told that the shoes had a bourgeois smell. Now he remembered that he had once seen the son of his former landlord Hwang wearing this kind of footwear brought back from Japan where he was educated. Suddenly he felt nauseated, pulled off the shoes and flung them away. The pair of shoes skated beyond a mound, in a steep curve. This again called forth loud guffaws.

That was not all, however, for Yong Suk took a step forward to announce that Choe Chil Song's wife had just given birth to a strapping son.

"Why do you tell us that now? What a girl you are."

Pak Hung Dok looked most unhappy and shook his head. He knew the child was expected but he had never dreamed it would happen on this of all days. Pak Hung Dok suddenly looked serious. He faced his comrades and suggested they congratulate him on the birth of a son amid the flames of revolution. The guerrillas applauded long and loud. Choe Chil Song blushed to the roots of his hair and was so utterly embarrassed that he dropped his head between his knees.

Now the soldiers started up a desultory conversation and smoked their cigarettes. What to name the new-born baby, that was the question. Some of the guerrillas said it was the father's business, not theirs, while others insisted that it was their duty to give the baby a name because this was a festive occasion for their friend and it would be unkind not to give him a nice name. They began suggesting different names, pairing one character with another. Those who knew Chinese characters produced a few names based on Choe Chil Song's relations. All sorts of names were suggested. Someone claimed that it would be a good idea to include the character *su* for longevity, others the character *bok* for happiness, *myong* for brilliance, *hae* for the ocean or *ho* for tiger. Something wrong was found with all of them, and presently the list was exhausted. Se Gol then suggested that the women comrades might have some good names to put forward. Yong Suk, who had been fumbling with some white material under a tree, said after a few moments' hesitation:

"Please don't laugh. I haven't really had time to think about it. I just...."

"Don't put on such airs," Cha Gi Yong said, sarcastically.

"You think naming the new generation is easy then? Ha, ha, ha."

"Oh, you are being long-winded!"

"Well, here's my idea. They say we are living in a revolutionary era, yes? All of us have pledged to make revolution to the end of our days. The boy was born on a revolutionary day, so since we want him to carry on the revolution well, I suggest that he should be called Choe Hyok Myong (Hyok Myong means revolution—Tr.)."

"Bravo!"

"Wonderful!"

"Thumbs up, Comrade Yong Suk," said Cha Gi Yong, sticking up his stumpy thumb.

"Ha, ha, ha. That name is right on target."

"That's the best name anyone can think of."

"So much for the discussion. Any objections? If not, I'll put it to the vote."

Chin Il Man, with shoulders slightly bent, rose to his feet. He swallowed hard and raised his hand.

"Comrades, I agree with Yong Suk. But there's one thing I should tell you. I'm sorry I didn't have time before. You know the order we received during the battle here at Ssoksae Valley? Our Comrade Commander ordered us not to let the enemy into Spring Valley whatever happened. There might have been other reasons as well, but I believe that the Comrade Commander was worried about the village where Comrade Choe Chil Song's wife was lying in childbirth. I heard him give the order. Yes, our new generation has really emerged from the flames of the revolution. We will never forget that."

"Hear, hear."

"So let us congratulate Comrade Choe Chil Song, and Choe Hyok Myong who was born today."

Chin Il Man clapped his hands over his head. Thunderous applause rocked the thicket. As the applause died down Yong Suk rose and stepped up to Choe Chil Song. She raised her hand in salute and held out the white material she had been working on. It was a jacket for the baby hastily made by the women guerrillas.

"This is for Choe Hyok Myong from the comrades of our company."

Yong Suk unfolded the jacket and showed it round and then held it out with both hands.

"A wonderful present!"

"Not a present. A decoration."

"Choe Hyok Myong is getting his first guerrilla uniform, eh?"

"Go ahead and receive it."

Choe Chil Song, sitting with his head bent, could not get up, but Cha Gi Yong pulled him up by the arms. Choe received it with some embarrassment. Then the clapping of many hands and merry laughter again echoed through the forest.

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Next day the villagers who had taken refuge in the mountains returned to their homes.

As had been decided at headquarters, the guerrillas got down to the job of stabilizing the people's lives. They rebuilt the ruined houses and collected household goods. Meanwhile, sentries were posted on all paths ten *ri* or so away, to watch out for the enemy.

When dusk came and insects began to chirp and mist spread over the waterside, many people came into the thicket. On Comrade Kum Song's initiative, there was to be a meeting of all the guerrillas and the chiefs of the revolutionary organizations and activists of Ssoksae Valley.

A campfire was built in the centre of the meeting place, and the participants gathered round. Comrade Kum Song appeared on a little elevation to the right. Spreading his feet on the grass on which the dew had just begun to settle, he started his speech in a low voice.

First of all he spoke of the significance of founding the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army in the struggle for the national liberation of Korea and touched on general problems concerning the revolutionary bases. A revolutionary base had to be a logistics base, a strategic stronghold in the armed struggle against the Japanese and the fountainhead and citadel of the Korean revolution. This was a strategic problem inevitable once the necessity of taking up arms arose. He said that our armed struggle now under way had no home front, nor regular army support, and must rely on this base, to strengthen the guerrilla forces, step up preparations for founding the party and lay the mass foundations built on a united front. It was here at the

base that leadership would be given to the Korean revolution and the patterns would be set for various social reforms, as well as for a government of the future. He pointed out that in the six months since the founding of the Anti-Japanese Guerilla Army, bases had been built simultaneously all along the Tuman-gang River which was advantageous for us both geographically and in class composition. However, he warned, by merely securing the necessary area we could not solve the problem of a base. The forces to defend the base would have to be created first and the base must be sufficiently prepared to meet any of our strategic demands. Therefore, the base had to be established in two ways. One was the liberated area or complete guerrilla base and the other was the semi-guerrilla base to be set up around the liberated areas. Superficially, the semi-guerrilla bases would look as if they were under Japanese imperialist rule, while, in practice, they were fully controlled by revolutionary forces; it must be made certain that though the enemy ruled the areas in the day the revolutionary organizations could work freely at night. These must be dependable rear bases which would defend the liberated areas. Figuratively speaking, he pointed out, they must cover the liberated area as thick bark does the trunk of the tree. Meanwhile, our revolutionary influence must be increased in enemy-held areas. In these areas all activities would be underground. Gradually, most of this part of the world would have to be turned into semi-guerrilla bases, into liberated areas. Needless to say, since the revolutionary bases were amid the fierce waves of the revolution, they could not be immutable, they could not be moulded on one pattern....

In this way, he set forth his long-cherished idea of setting up bases, and then proposed immediate tasks for the liberated areas. Most important of all, he stressed, was to stabilize the living conditions of the people. Many people who had come into the revolutionary zones and the victims of the "punitive operations" were finding it difficult to live, or were just wandering about. The Japanese imperialists would perform more "punitive operations" on a larger scale and in a still more cruel way. Under these circumstances, to stabilize their living conditions and unite them to defend the bases, a revolutionary government was essential. This government must shatter the whole machinery of reactionary rule and establish a new revolutionary order, solve the problems of food, clothing and housing for the

people, combat disease and enforce education. The revolutionary government must be a people's government that would suit the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal democratic phase of the revolution, and it would be advisable first, as an interim measure, to form a revolutionary committee composed of representatives of different revolutionary organizations. This was a pressing demand of the revolution; this was urgently needed, for instance, in the present situation at Ssoksae Valley. Comrade Kum Song also spent a good deal of time explaining ways and means to develop the revolutionary bases.

When he had finished speaking, the revolutionary committee was formed then and there for the Ssoksae Valley area. Representatives of the Anti-Imperialist League, Peasants' Association, Youth League and Women's Association were elected to the committee, and executive departments such as the military division, food administration division, land division and educational division were set up. The first session of the revolutionary committee discussed measures for the removal of the inhabitants to Spring Valley because the enemy would keep up his "punitive operations".

Han Hung Su was returning to his company headquarters alone after the meeting. Though he felt a little tired because he had been chasing round the whole day, he walked through the vines overgrown with horsetail grass with a vigorous step. Insects hummed noisily at every hand. That day he had attended two short meetings of commanders—in the morning and in the afternoon. The Comrade Commander never made decisions alone. He sought agreement through constant discussion even on any ripe questions; he even asked his comrades for approval on many matters he could well have dealt with himself. In the morning a whole range of organizational measures had been discussed, which had become essential with the founding of the revolutionary committee. Comrade Kum Song went into the ways and means down to the tiniest detail. In fact, forming this committee was by no means simple either in theory or in practice. But as usual he spoke in simple and easy terms and solved comprehensive, fundamental and unique problems the same way he handled everyday affairs. He stressed, as had been frequently the case at the Mingyuehkuo Meeting, that to win the revolution there must be bases. Although this problem had been discussed a couple of times during the march across Mt. Paekdu-san, Han Hung Su had

never expected it to be a matter of such pressing urgency that it had to be solved without delay. It was a tremendous idea, a great creation, to set up a liberated area and found a government in the place where the enemy's savage "punitive operations" had been shattered and his reactionary rule smashed, before the homeland had been completely liberated. The only forms of revolutionary government known in history were the Paris Commune and the Soviets initiated by Lenin. From what Comrade Kum Song had said that day, Korea was choosing a unique form of government that would suit her conditions. Driving the Japanese imperialists out of the homeland once and for all would not be so difficult. It would be achieved by expanding the liberated areas one by one—chasing the enemy out of a hundredth of the country today, a tenth tomorrow.

Arduous it was, but the navigation was glorious beyond measure; a dexterous helmsman was now facilitating it without a hitch. The helmsman was Comrade Kum Song and he would steer clear of the reefs, face the waves and cut through fog, guide the revolution and land it at this year's destination. The sail might tear or the bows might be smashed, but the revolution would move ahead. Feeling a pleasant thrill of excitement Han Hung Su walked on, quite unaware of where he was going. When he had collected himself, he headed towards the company barracks, plucking any odd blade of grass that stood in his path and chewing it. Whistling, he jumped over rocks and vines. There were lights in the village. Last night it had looked like a graveyard veiled in gloomy blackness but now it was enjoying the peace brought by the revolution. Dogs could be heard barking.

The village stood there as though nothing had happened and nothing ever would. There was not a sound, as there had been during the Paris Commune when Napoleon's *Arche de Triomphe*, symbol of chauvinism and national enmity, had crumbled or during the *Aurora's* grim gunfire. Nor were there the cheers of the masses on the march, beating their drums triumphantly. However, in this remote mountain hamlet on the Tuman-gang River barely marked on the largest map, the Japanese imperialists' colonial rule had suffered a great setback.

A shooting star fell over the village leaving a radiant streak in its wake. His arms stretched out as though to embrace the sky, Han Hung Su whirled round, laughing boisterously.

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On the knoll behind the company's barracks there was a long rock with a smooth top. Choe Chil Song climbed up there with an armful of straw. He looked around for a while and settled himself, facing the bright moonlight. There was a path nearby leading to the village but this place was quiet, just perfect for the work he wanted to do. If he was to make three or four pairs of straw sandals he would have to work until the Orion's Belt hung low above the top of the opposite mountain.

He sorted out a handful of straw and sat on it and placed a few bundles of neatly trimmed straw on his right. Holding the tips of the straw by the soles of his feet, he rested his elbow on his knee and stranded them lightly, so that a straw rope began to take shape. Giving a few more twists he measured the length of straw rope in the moonlight. It seemed a bit thick for the bracing of the sandal side-wings but it was so tightly twisted that it was as pleasant to the touch as a bean shell. He always used to make it thin, but doing this work for the first time after a long interval, his hands seemed to have lost their deftness. However, he was pleased to see that though he had become clumsy at stranding straw strips, he had got far more used to handling gun and pencil.

His unit was leaving the next day. It was a week since he had come here. For the last few days a day had seemed as long as a month, and life had been filled with so many complicated events that when he lay in bed and remembered what had happened in the day, he was not quite sure whether it had happened that day or some other. However, on the eve of his departure it seemed to him that the week had flown past like lightning and he was rather sorry about it. During this time stupendous events had taken place, not to mention his home-coming. He had engaged in a battle, attended meetings. And more than once he had been involved in truly impressive events.

The two ends of straw strips spiralled up crossing each other, and as his hands bent forward, a slender and smooth rope emerged between his palms. When his hands reached the level of his head he increased the speed of twisting and hackled

the rope in one breath. He then brought his hand behind him, lifting his buttocks slightly on one side, and pulled out the tip of the long straw rope, which coiled up. The twisting went on with a crisp crunch. His head was swaying, the upper part of his body leaning a trifle to the left. The straw had a peculiar smell neither pleasant nor unpleasant. Breaths of wind wafted the fragrance of mellow grass, and carried the noisy chirping of insects. Intoxicated by the tranquil, peaceful night, he moved his hands mechanically, no longer aware of what he was doing.

At the sound of footsteps Choe Chil Song interrupted his work to look round. Two or three persons were approaching slowly towards him. The moonlight reflected on their shoulders. They must be guerrillas.

"Who is there?"

Choe Chil Song sprang to his feet immediately. It was the Comrade Commander's voice. He dropped the piece of straw rope, whirled round, and bringing his heels together, replied; "It's Choe Chil Song."

"Oh, is it you, Comrade Choe Chil Song?"

"Yes."

Choe Chil Song took a step forward but the Comrade Commander was already on the top of the rock. He brought his hand up in a salute, and the Comrade Commander pushed it down, and inquired what he had been doing in the dark.

"I'm twisting straw."

"Straw?..."

Glancing at the straw littered around, the Comrade Commander said that he had wanted to see him and ask after his family but unfortunately he had had no time, and inquired about his father's health.

"Let's sit here and have a talk."

The Comrade Commander sat down on the straw and pulled Choe Chil Song's hand.

"That's all right."

"What do you mean all right? Come on and sit down here."

The Comrade Commander was on his way to meet Paek Gwang Myong in the front village.

"Your father is suffering from asthma?"

"Yes, but he says he is feeling much better."

"Much better? I was told that boiled rowan is good for

asthma, but I'm afraid you haven't got them in this part of the country...."

Then he asked him many questions: How things were going with his family, whether the rain leaked into his hut, if the floor-heated room worked all right, if he had any relations and had heard from them, how was his wife and so on. Choe Chil Song answered all these questions briskly but when asked about his wife, he could not, ducking his head.

"Anyhow I'm sorry. I should have gone to your place. But you know you are leaving tomorrow?"

"Yes, I know."

"Then you should go home and tell her that you are leaving."

"That's all right."

"No. You are wrong. When you leave you must tell your family about it."

"...When I was at home yesterday I told my wife that if I did not come, that would mean that I had left."

"That is not the way to part. That's what tramps do; they say no news is good news. If you have nothing special to do, go down now."

"I can go there early in the morning."

"What are you braiding the straw for? In the dead of the night?"

Hesitating for a moment, he replied that he was making a pair of straw sandals.

"Straw sandals?"

The Comrade Commander seemed to be wondering why he had no shoes, when Choe Chil Song immediately explained that he had not known that they had slipped off during the fighting.

"You mean they slipped off when you were getting the gun?"

"Yes."

"You strangled him, didn't you?" the Comrade Commander grinned—some time ago the men had laughed when Pak Hung Dok enacted so vividly what Choe Chil Song had done to get his gun.

"Let me see if that will suit the sandals."

"Oh, please don't look."

Choe Chil Song placed the coiled strip of straw rope behind his back in confusion.

"I think I also know something about straw rope and sandals."

In his childhood he used to help his grandfather twist straw and braid straw sandals. And he always wore straw sandals. Choe Chil Song reluctantly showed him his product.

"Isn't it a bit too thick? Well, if you want your straw sandals to last, this will be better than a thin one. But you have to give tight twists. Ah yes, you have twisted it well."

He scrutinized the smooth, firmly twisted straw rope in the moonlight and asked Choe how long it would take for him to finish one pair.

"I used to be able to make two pairs after supper before going to bed."

"How many *ri* do you think you can cover with this pair of sandals?"

"I can march one day."

"One day? Then what will you do?"

"I'll make another pair."

"And when that gets worn out?"

"When it gets worn out, I'll make another."

"You'll make one pair a day?"

"I think I can do it."

He thought a few moments. He has a long, long way to go and he has no footwear. And he is stranding straws and braiding sandals deep into the night. When one pair wears out he will make another, and when those wear out, he will braid still another. In this brisk answer from one of his men, a former bond-slave, Comrade Kum Song perceived a great ennobled idea.

A big battle is on. This is as fierce as one in which bullets are fired and explosives are released: Another front has been created to eliminate the penury that was imposed on the Korean people by the aggressors for many years and to get over famine, cold and rags.

With flashing eyes Comrade Kum Song stared at Choe Chil Song for a long while, and putting down the piece of straw rope, took his hands in his. He felt the rough and calloused hands. With these hands he was going to cope with every ordeal on a long journey God knows how long.

"When it gets worn out, I'll draw another."

Choe Chil Song's confident reply again clutched at his heart. Firmly grasping his hands, Comrade Kum Song said:

"Go ahead and work, Comrade Choe. Yours is a fine resolve. You are making a pair of sandals with straw, and you'll have to walk your way into the distant future with that spirit, with that stamina. And you'll have to liberate our homeland, humiliated by its backwardness, build modern industries and develop a paradise on earth. By doing this, you must make sure that our people will free themselves of the miseries caused by the aggressors—those to blame for their having to live in hunger and in rags. So you have three things in your hands now—a gun, a straw rope to overcome poverty and a notebook to learn your mother tongue. Do you understand what this means?"

Choe Chil Song could find no answer and sat with his head bowed. He only felt his heart pounding wildly. He thought the Comrade Commander was praising him too much for a thing which was, to him, a trifle. At this moment he did not fully understand the meaning of what Comrade Kum Song had said. But anyway, he did perceive a great task ahead of him, and was strongly moved by a lofty sense of responsibility and pride that the Comrade Commander had entrusted it to him.

Shaking Choe Chil Song's shoulder, Comrade Kum Song said:

"Good! Now, do your best and make a good one."

He laughed out loud, patting the silent Choe Chil Song on the back.

"You're going to do it? Fine, go ahead and try."

He could have advised him not to take the trouble to do such a tiresome job and could have told him that he would get him a pair of sneakers. But he did not.

The Comrade Commander was gone and Choe Chil Song went back to his work. Time went by. He took out a tobacco pouch to smoke and raised his head. A white figure was squirming down below. It did not look like either a guerrilla or a villager. The whole body was covered with a white quilt, including the head. Choe Chil Song strained every nerve. Picking up the rifle by his side, he hid himself behind the rock and challenged the oncomer. But the white figure kept moving up slowly. Feeling uncanny, Choe Chil Song stepped forward and gave another shout: "Who's there?"

Simultaneously with his challenge, a baby started crying.

"Oh!"

Choe Chil Song was electrified. Instinctively he ran down

the slope, his mouth open and his arms outstretched. It was the same crying he had heard several times that day. By the time he reached the white figure, the baby had stopped crying. Choe Chil Song was confused but soon he had confirmed that it was his wife.

"What's the matter with you, wife?" he asked hurriedly, taking her hands in his.

"Oh, it was you." Ssanggama, covered in a quilt from top to toe, said in her usual calm voice. "What did you shout like that for? The baby was frightened."

"I did not know it was you."

Embarrassed as if he had committed some unforgivable blunder, Choe Chil Song took the infant in the quilt and settled down on the smooth top of the rock.

"Why did you come when you are in such an awful condition? Hum?"

"I was afraid you had already gone...."

"Ah, what a woman! You are really terrible. How can you be a guerrilla's wife?..."

"Don't talk like that."

"I'm making revolution. But you really.... I told you already yesterday that if I don't come, it means that I've left here."

"I know that. I know."

"You know what?"

The baby who had been wriggling was quiet; he must be asleep. Though he would often tease his wife, he still loved her. He lifted the edge of the quilt to take a peep at his young son.

"Look at this," said his wife, shaking his knee, and produced something. "Then you'll know why I came to see you." His wife raised the pitch of her voice. "The General sent this to me."

"What? What did the General...the General, you say?"

"He sent me this bear's gall. Yong Suk visited me just now."

"A bear's gall from the General?"

He laid down the baby and held up a small paper package in both hands. Like a lost soul, he glanced absently at the sky for a while, then rose, and in a choked voice, shouted: "General!" The moonlight reflected brightly on his tear-filled eyes.

"For such a humble man as me, you...."

He did not know what to say. His heart was brimming with

immense gratitude, his throat contracted painfully and his limbs shook. He remained standing for many minutes before he sat down and looked at his wife. Her dark hair sticking out from under the white quilt, her oval face, the little one in her embrace—he stared at them as if watching something mysterious, then, opening his arms, he hugged them both.

“Listen, wife. My heart is leaping for joy. A former servant and a nursemaid are being shown such kindly care. Just think of it.... Oh, why am I so bad at speaking....”

They sobbed, clasping each other's hands. They had never been loved by any one except the fathers and mothers who had brought them up. They had been discarded, kicked about like stones on the roadside. And now for the first time in their lives they were meeting with kindness and concern. They had been thirsting avidly for human kindness. That was why they were carried away by an ecstatic emotion as though embracing an ocean; the maltreatment, hunger, insult and contempt had been washed away like a dry leaf by a powerful current.

Ssanggama sobbed, looking up at her husband. Choe Chil Song, looking down at his wife, sobbed as well as he said:

“Remember, wife. The General always looks after us. You understand?”

“You must work well. So that you can repay his kindness.”

At this moment the baby in Ssanggama's bosom began to cry. The startled mother turned the child in her arms and tried to lull him, when Choe Chil Song took him and held him up in the air.

“Now, say something, baby.”

Tossing his head he whirled round, his son held high in the air.

“Hyok Myong! Cry! Cry at the top of your voice! Good. That's my boy.”

As though answering his father's demand, Choe Hyok Myong screamed, kicking his feet. In the summer night, under the bright moon, the couple stood still without stirring.

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Walking along the dark road, Comrade Kum Song could

still picture Choe Chil Song's stooping figure twisting the straw rope.

A great battle front had now developed before his eyes. Once he had told one of the guerrillas that there were three fronts—the political front symbolized by the gun; the economic front by the straw rope and the cultural front by the notebook. The historic task before him now was to win on all these fronts. A desperate battle had to be waged to reclaim the usurped right of existence, a bloody fight to put an end to the underdevelopment and backwardness forced on the Korean people. All these objectives could be won only by tireless and undaunted endeavour. He had the feeling he was standing at the corner of a vast wilderness spread before his eyes with the first plough to upturn it into fertile soil. Comrade Kum Song hurried along the road, deep in thought.

On hearing from his orderly of Comrade Kum Song's arrival in the village, Paek Gwang Myong with the silver-rimmed glasses slipped into his white single-breasted suit and came out running. Comrade Kum Song called at the hostel and met members of the Children's Corps, and then went out to the riverside. Walking side by side with Paek Gwang Myong, he made detailed inquiries as to how the revolutionary school was being run. He also asked about the two boys—Chojjae and Sang Hun. Paek Gwang Myong walked a step behind Comrade Kum Song, adjusting his unbuttoned coat with both hands. His heart was already giving a leap.

How anxiously he had wanted to see him! He had never forgotten the General. Particularly since that night at Hsiao-shaho the General's image had been in his heart; the explanations he had made with such seriousness that night had always rung in his ears. However, he had been deeply shocked when he and Jong Ok met Pak Gi Nam at Yungping. Since he had been touched by Jong Ok's extraordinary devotion and concern for the orphans, he had entered Pak Gi Nam's room where the red banner was hanging, boldly but without any definite plan of his own. The result was that he had had to spend many a sleepless, restless night, only to find himself in a cold sweat in the morning, and writhing in agony by day. He would wonder if he had deviated; whether he was taking the course he should; whether he was overestimating himself and taking a rash action. His heart had been torn by many worries. However, he had had a ray of hope which would bolster him up—that he would meet

the General again and open his heart to him. He had heard the day before that the General had come to Ssoksae Valley, but had not had the courage to go and see him. He had done nothing worthwhile, he thought, and had not the effrontery to go and see him. He had tried to persuade himself that it was no use going to the General and causing him unnecessary worries; he was such a busy man. His impulse to go and meet him and his self-restraint were still in conflict when the General himself came along. Now he was at a loss how to express his delight and gratitude.

They reached the waterside. The heavy mist, blue in the moonlight, floated lazily down the stream. There was a fresh fragrance of water and the sound of it tumbling over rocks. Pushing aside a few wormwood stalks on a patch of turf as smooth as a carpet, the General invited Paek Gwang Myong to sit down.

"Come and sit over here. Let's cool ourselves."

Paek Gwang Myong hesitated, stooping over, his spectacles in his hand. Comrade Kum Song sat down, pulling the teacher by the hand to make him sit by his side. Feeling somewhat calmer now, Paek Gwang Myong explained what he had done since their first meeting at Hsiaoshaho. Most of his account concerned his relationship with Jong Ok, and his regret that he had been unable to give her much help. When he finished, Comrade Kum Song asked him detailed questions: How many pupils had he; whether there were wounded children; what they had eaten for supper today; what he was teaching them; how was the Children's Corps group run? Then he praised Paek Gwang Myong for doing his work well despite all difficulties in this period of disturbances.

The General was aware of what had happened at Yungping.

"Go back to Yungping. Go there with Comrade Jong Ok. You have suffered hardships because of the Japs' intensified 'punitive operations'. But if you had not wandered about, you would have had less troubles. You know how anxiously Comrade Li Chol Gun is waiting for you? Maybe today there will be a man from his place."

"What good is there having such a man as me?"

"Such a man as you?"

Comrade Kum Song turned to glance at Paek Gwang Myong who was taking off his glasses, and resumed:

"You are not alone, Mr. Paek. You are taking care of our younger generation. And among the ranks you are in there are many Korean intellectuals. You are not alone. Don't be so timid. As I told you the other day, you must be hard on yourself, but bold as well and you must react bravely to what goes on around you. In his letter Comrade Chol Gun wondered why you did not meet him then."

"I don't know Comrade Li Chol Gun."

"He is our representative for the area of Wangching. Remember you cannot do anything if you don't rely on the organization and just wander about like a hobo. I think I understand why you were named Gwang Myong (means Bright Light in Korean—Tr.). That bright light you are seeking will be gained only when you depend on the revolutionary organization."

He laughed boisterously for a moment before asking the teacher closely about the way his revolutionary school was run.

"We should not make reservoirs of knowledge out of our little ones but train them to be indomitable, revolutionary fighters who are capable of destroying Japanese imperialism. Am I right? Our enemy are the Japanese imperialists who are aiming at eliminating the whole Korean race. History knows quite a few cases where a nation or a native race has been exterminated by aggressors. The American Indians and some races in Africa can be quoted as examples. How then can we guarantee that we will not be their victims? What is our advantage?"

"It is our strong resistance to the aggressors; it is our determination to wipe out the armed enemy by force of arms. Therefore, we need arms. Chojjae plunged into a danger spot to get the bayonets the fleeing enemy had left behind. Must we prohibit such action? It is perfectly natural that you should treasure and take care of your children. This is admirable. However, you must look after and educate them in such a way that they may strike the enemy, revenge themselves on him and work for the revolution. We don't need the benevolence and honesty based on bourgeois humanitarianism. Rather, they are taboo."

"The enemy took Chojjae's father and mother and he, by some miracle, survived among the ashes. Don't you think he should have a spear or gun with which to vent his wrath on the enemy? You think he is too young? The enemy regards our little ones as his foe, so why shouldn't we let them fight? This

is one of the fundamentals of the class struggle. What do you think?"

He paused. Paek Gwang Myong pushed up his spectacles on his slippery, perspiring nose.

"I believe you can use the impressions you gained from Chojjae's story to educate your youngsters. In order to hoodwink the Japanese police and convey a message, Chojjae had to box his best friend's nose. How did he feel then? You can use that as material. Do you think this is less effective than preaching what is called humanity, justice and intelligence or promotion of virtue and the rejection of vice or praise of truth, goodness and beauty? Don't you think it necessary to tell your children stories about our soldiers leaping over their dead comrades to rush the enemy position, about those who died on the gallows, gallantly shouting 'Long live the Korean revolution!', about Comrade Kim Mun who cut his own throat so as not to divulge the secrets of his organization, and about Comrade Hong Yang Sun who remained silent as they gouged out her breast?"

Paek Gwang Myong mopped the sweat from the nape of his neck with his handkerchief. Comrade Kum Song said this because it was necessary for Paek Gwang Myong himself. He could have praised the teacher much more for his good job. But a hot blast is needed to steel a human being. Paek Gwang Myong took off his glasses and wiped them on his handkerchief. He was tormented by a guilty conscience, but that was better for him.

After a while Comrade Kum Song started discussing more ordinary matters, in an endeavour to ease the rather strained atmosphere.

"Anyhow I cannot but admire you for coming to this revolutionary zone. This is an unusual decision on your part, Mr. Paek."

"You might well say that I've come here on the waves of the revolution, just like a dry leaf floating on the water."

This metaphor was followed up by the impressions he had received at Hsiaoshaho.

"I'm not sure about my own case. It could be likened to a migratory bird passing through a season."

"That's an interesting metaphor. But there are different kinds of birds, I should say."

"You have in mind swallows and wild geese?"

"Some of them migrate from the North Pole to the South Pole."

With a smile Comrade Kum Song gazed into the other's face for a few moments; he seemed to be reading the feelings of Paek Gwang Myong as he drew a grand picture of reality in his agitated mind. Paek Gwang Myong's shoulders heaved heavily; it was hard to tell whether he was sighing from uneasiness or just because he was smoking. After a few puffs of smoke he opened his mouth.

"Frankly speaking, I am worried. I am often frightened at myself. And I ask myself, 'Are you not living like a migratory bird that flies to a warmer place to seek food and nest?' This is a sheer stupidity. I try to reject it positively. But when I wake up in the morning I find myself sweating all over."

"So struggle against oneself is more severe than a declaration to oneself. Because one must have a strong consciousness that it is better to swallow fire and turn into charcoal than to breathe the air of the bourgeoisie contaminated with exploitation and hypocrisy and containing drops of blood shed by the working people. Be bold, Mr. Paek! If you want to be a bird, don't be a migratory bird but an undying bird."

"Do you think I can ever be one? My motto has always been: I shall not be crushed even under the weight of the universe."

"I think I understand it. But how about this one? 'If the enemy does not surrender, kill him!' Isn't it better?"

Comrade Kum Song turned round and shouted to an orderly to bring him a rifle. Pyon In Chol brought a 38-rifle. Handing it over to Paek Gwang Myong, Comrade Kum Song said in a lowered voice.

"Here you are. Take this. It was wrested from the enemy in the last battle."

Paek Gwang Myong sprang to his feet but he was so taken aback that he just stood in bewilderment.

"Take it. I believe you will be bold with this in your hands. Come on!"

Paek Gwang Myong held out his thin hands to receive the gun but it weighed heavily in his hands and he barely managed to straighten up his body which had been leaning forward. Despite his proclamation that he would not be crushed even under the weight of the universe, he seemed to be painfully pressed by some irresistible weight. Then suddenly he slung the gun on his

shoulder and snapping his heels together, stood in front of the General.

"General!"

Words trembled on the tip of his tongue but he could not speak out. He was terribly excited.

"Fire it once and see if it is in good order."

Paek Gwang Myong slipped off his rifle, and placing it ready for firing, pulled the trigger into the sky. The nocturnal silence was broken.

"Good. I'm sure you can hit the enemy with that."

After seeing the General off, Paek Gwang Myong again went down to the waterside.

Holding the gun against his chest he walked blindly upstream. On reaching the shoal he had waded across the other day, he turned back and walked down. A violent torrent was rising within him. A drop of water swaying on a blade of grass had fallen and was flowing down to join the ocean; it flowed down in a roaring wave. What was that sound? Was it the footfall of an intellectual who has taken fresh steps forward or the rumble of the old past being blasted? O, life, you are courageous! O, revolution, revolution! Pressing the gun against his chest Paek Gwang Myong walked up and down the waterside, stamping on the pebbles and thorny vines and in the puddles. Intense loyalty to General Kum Song surged up within him like tidal waves, its shafts striking at the inner wall of his being.

Drenched to the skin by the heavy mist, he walked on and on till daybreak.

The sun had risen. Resplendent as ever, it soared up over the top of the mountain and shed its light upon the universe. The mist cleared gradually from the bank of the stream and the first rays of sunlight burst through to reach Paek Gwang Myong's damp body. He raised his head high and smiled, throwing out his chest.

A smooth, straight road ran across a vast plain of ripe beans and heavy ears of millet. The road seemed little used, for right in the middle plantains and cosmoses were growing and some of the cart tracks were filled with water.

The millet field swayed in the lightest breeze. Long ribbon-like dried millet leaves rustled desolately touching each other or dropped hopelessly. The bean stalks were almost bare of leaves and the swollen pods which seemed about to burst at any moment were swinging. High above the swallows crisscrossed the blue sky.

A middle-aged man emerged from the corner of the bean field, holding a little girl by the hand. He was An Dong Hak. After Big Valley he had moved on to Tunhua and then travelled more than a thousand *ri* to get here, to the Tunghua area on the Amnok-gang River. He was looking for General Kum Song. He got to one place only to find the General had just gone, and he went on hopefully to the next, only to hear that the General had not yet arrived. He was not preparing a map like Kim Jong Ho, the geographer, or wandering aimlessly like the vagrant poet Kim Sat Gat. He had an ambition to reform society, and this endless journey had deeply vexed him. He had to meet the Korean people's great leader who would steer the ship that had lost her course on the vast ocean, who would lead Korea, tossed by a storm and groping in a fog, who would embrace all Koreans who were shedding tears of blood and had their hearts bruised.

An Dong Hak walked on, with a bowed head. He was dog-tired but he had not lost hope. He was now on his way to see Chu Ho Rim.

He had left Seoul early last spring. It was a chilly day, three months after his wife's death. He had stood in front of Seoul Railway Station, holding his daughter's hand. His eyes, which looked up at the northern sky, were dim with tears.

Though he had had many friends, none had come to the station to see him off.

"Now, get in the train."

His innocent daughter was overjoyed to be in a train after a long interval. He was going farther and farther away from Seoul Railway Station which looked so dreary and forlorn like a bleak wilderness though it was crowded with jostling people.

Was he to be ruined or regenerated? He found himself running away from the crossroads of destiny. As always with those who cannot look into the future, he looked back on his past every day, all the way from Chongjin to Namyang and from Namyang to Big Valley.

After the "punitive operation" in Big Valley he had reached Tunhua, but he was told that the cousin who had been working at a railway construction site had disappeared right after the "September 18 Incident". His cousin's wife who had three children suggested that they eke out their living together by getting whatever jobs they could. So he worked as a porter. In his cousin's patched work clothes he carried loads on a handcart for hire. Sometimes he carried household goods for families that were moving, or coal or firewood. When he earned 50 *chon* or a *won* he would buy a *doe* of millet and come home utterly exhausted. Fate constantly whispered to him: You are ruined. One day he heard some astonishing news. Handbills had been pasted up in the streets and crowds of people raised quite a hubbub. He was thunderstruck, for the handbill bore a fiery slogan: "Down with Japanese imperialism!" It said that the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army had been founded and that the armed struggle against Japan was led by General Kum Song, the national hero of the Korean people. For three days he had pulled his cart up and down the street, from the residential quarters of railway officials past the long brick wall of the Japanese army barracks down to the noodle house at the market place, looking for the handbills. Then, in front of the railway station, he noticed a young man in his twenties. Surrounded by a crowd of people the young man, in shabby clothes, was telling them about the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army which he claimed to have seen. An Dong Hak put down the handcart and listened to him over the people's shoulders. He elbowed his way into the circle, grabbed hold of the young man and pulled him towards him.

"You mean you have seen the guerrillas with your own eyes?"

The large-eyed youth was annoyed by the other's arrogance but, finding that he had had no ill intention, replied loudly.

"Yes, I've seen them. That's why I'm telling you. I've seen them with these eyes of mine."

The young fellow proudly continued his story. Last May Day at a corner of a street in Antu a bugle had sounded and soldiers had marched along with a red flag at the front. The flag fluttered, shining brilliantly in the morning sunshine. A tall man with extraordinary flashing eyes was at the head. He walked composedly yet briskly, a pistol in his belt, waving his hand in response to the people's cheers. Marching down the rather narrow streets of Antu the long columns shouted slogans and hurrah. The leader was none other than General Kum Song.

"Workers of the world, unite!"

"Down with Japanese imperialism!"

"Long live May Day, the militant workers' holiday!"

"Long live the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army, the revolutionary armed force of the Korean people!"

They marched in fine array, their guns shining. They had donned khaki uniforms and their caps bore red stars. All had the red arm bands that the revolutionary army wore on holidays. Everyone came out into the street to see them—old people, children, women, youths, and they all waved their hands and shouted hurrah. The name "General Kum Song" passed from mouth to mouth. Some said that they had seen him at Hsinglungtsun while others claimed that they had seen him at Hsiaoshaho.

"Long live General Kum Song!"

Shouts of joy burst from the crowd....

"Let's go, Sugi. To see the General."

Towards the end of May, taking his daughter's hand An Dong Hak abruptly left Tunhua and trekked along a black dirt road to the south. At a pass on his way to Antu he heard a rumour that the guerrilla army had gone towards Mt. Paekdu-san. He turned his face towards Fusung. When he arrived at Chonsangdegi, the highest village on the slopes of Mt. Paekdu-san, he heard different news and had to make for Tunghua. Everywhere he went, the people were talking about General Kum Song.

He had gone a thousand *ri*. Once in a while he had got a

ride on a cart or on the back of a horse or ox, but for the most part he had walked. In several places south of Tunhua and at Antu the people had told him that if he waited there he would eventually meet the General but An Dong Hak was too impatient. His journey was endless. He had been at Fusung for about a fortnight, where he heard rumours that General Kum Song had been at Chonsangdegi and had then cut across country towards Tunghua where Chu Ho Rim was. This he had been told by a man who had had a long connection with the Independence Army. The man said he had heard that news while visiting a village just below Chonsangdegi. He said confidently that even if General Kum Song had not gone to where Chu Ho Rim was, once he got there he would know the General's whereabouts. And An Dong Hak firmly believed it.

A gust of wind rustling past the bean field scared a flock of birds and sent them fluttering skywards.

"I'm cold, Father."

His daughter's lips were pale and there were goose-pimples on her neck.

"Be patient, little girl. Wind like this will make you healthy, you know."

Only after sunset did he get to a small straggling hamlet. He went to an inn.

"Is the master in?"

An Dong Hak entered the yard surrounded by a thick mud wall. The front door opened and a tall, broad shouldered man of about 50 came out, dragging his straw sandals. He was ushered into the upper room with his load.

Pak Chom Ji, the inn-keeper, swept the mat-covered floor with a broom for formality's sake and kept chatting to show his friendliness. He was kind to his guest in words, but in his heart was sparing. He asked An Dong Hak whether he would take supper and when he would leave, and then stepped down into the back yard to help his wife unhusk the beans to be boiled with rice. If the guest had not come, he would have heard the amazing story to the finish from a young traveller who was boarding in the other room, and he was very sorry to miss it. This young man who was from Tunghua had brought astounding news. It was about the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army; he said he was not sure about its exact strength, but five guerrillas had boarded at his aunt's house. They wore neat uniforms and caps and carried guns. All of them were young and vigorous and they had

become good friends with the family of the house. They respected the old and loved children like their own brothers and sisters. They fetched water, chopped firewood, swept the yard and weeded the vegetable garden and brought the firewood indoors. In the few days they had stayed there they had built gutters around the house, repaired the path to the well and made a wooden frame for it. In the evenings they taught the people militant songs and explained to them how to drive out the Japanese imperialists and win national independence. While telling his tale, the traveller with a pockmarked nose was often moved so that his eyes brimmed with tears.

He said that one day there was a gathering to welcome the guerrillas. In the spacious meeting hall songs were sung and speeches made. He fluently recited a few words from a song sung by the guerrillas.

*We are the fire that spreads across the plains
And the hammer that breaks the iron chains.
The red banner is the token of our hope....*

Urged by the inn-keeper, the traveller had sung the part of the song, though his voice was rather tuneless. Then he had pointed out that what he had said so far was only the beginning of the story, and led the inn-keeper into the main subject: on General Kum Song, Commander of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army.

"That day when the gathering of welcome was held I had a chance to see him. I saw him close up when he crossed the yard to enter the meeting hall. At first glance there was little difference between him and other guerrillas; he wore a plain uniform, had a huge pistol at his side. But to me, he looked a real general. His eyes had a spark that ordinary people's don't have. He would be able to see a thousand *ri* ahead, I thought. Once I saw him smiling. How generous and kindhearted he looked! The news spread far and wide, and many people came from nearby villages to look at him."

Then he got to the gossip—about the soldiers of the Independence Army whom the guerrillas had rescued and about Commander Chu who had reportedly received important instructions from the General. It was around this time that An Dong Hak had called him from outside, interrupting the story telling.

An Dong Hak did not know this; and he went out silently with his daughter to a nearby stream to wash.

Next morning he was told by his roommate, a young man of a little over 20, that the inn-keeper worked as a messenger for the Independence Army stationed in this area. An Dong Hak decided to stay here another day to get to know him. To achieve his aim, he needed to meet Chu Ho Rim. So it seemed to be a good idea to get the inn-keeper's help since he was connected with Chu Ho Rim. First of all, he thought he ought to tell the inn-keeper why he had come to this place so that he would have faith in him.

After An Dong Hak had spoken, the inn-keeper slapped his knee with his hand and laughed.

"I could imagine what you had come here for. My first impression was right."

Putting on the air of a great man, the master laughed aloud with his pipe between his lips. An Dong Hak knew, of course, that some sectors of the Independence Army were anti-communist; so he had simply said that he had been engaged in the independence movement and wanted to see Chu Ho Rim so that he could continue his activity. The inn-keeper, who was inclined to be boastful, assured him that he would take him to Chu Ho Rim the next day. Having heard the story about General Kum Song, he had a burning desire to go and confirm it for himself.

"Let's leave tomorrow, then. I've got something to do there. I've been to Chunggang, and I've had no news from there for a month now."

That day An Dong Hak was in high spirits and went angling with the inn-keeper who was keen on it himself.

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That same day, Chu Ho Rim finished his hastily prepared supper and began to get ready for the journey. Though almost forty, he was solidly built and as energetic as a young man. But age asserts itself—his forehead had grown broader, his hair was very thin in front and he had crow's-feet at the corners of his eyes. He had nothing to take with him, but he felt strangely ill

at ease, as though he had forgotten something. Like most wives, Chu Ho Rim's wife had become garrulous with the years. She protested against her husband's departure on the evening of a day when she had dreamed a bad dream. He wanted to shout down his nagging wife but, instead, just asked her to bring him an extra coat. Ready to leave, he waited for Chang.

In fact, if it had not been for this Chang he would not have been in such a hurry. Chang had said that he was closely connected with the unit of the National Salvation Army stationed some 200 *ri* away from here. He had told Chu that he had informed Chui Dong-yun's unit of the National Salvation Army of the difficult situation Chu's troops were in and had arranged to get some weapons and war funds from that unit. And he had suggested they go there together to conclude the negotiations. And after thinking it over for several days, Chu had agreed to go.

Presently Chang came. Staff Officer Choe and Advisor Hwang followed their chief to see him off. Choe had been opposed to his journey from the start. He insisted that it was needless for them to swallow their pride. Hwang, on the other hand, had complacently encouraged him to go, saying that they had nothing to lose.

Chu Ho Rim and his party passed the entrance of the town. It was already dark, but the wind had not died down and the millet field rustled like a current in the sea. This was refreshing to Chu Ho Rim. Before he started he had been oppressed by a strange premonition, but once on the road he felt invigorated.

While walking along the road he was suddenly struck by the thought that life was empty. How could he accomplish the great task of national salvation by leading this kind of life? At any rate, he himself was to blame. At one time he had been so confident that he had imagined himself freeing his homeland of three thousand *ri* in a single stroke, but before he knew it he had grown timid.

He lit a cigarette and took several puffs at it. A bluish cloud of smoke curled up into the dark grey sky. He remembered General Kum Song's visit early last summer, and was deeply repenting his attitude towards the General. Why had he been so hesitant? He had lacked courage, and was now asking himself why. Somehow he had played into Advisor Hwang's hands, but this had not been the prime factor leading to his present re-

penance. He coughed a couple of times and lit another cigarette. It was exhilarating. He had imagined that once all worries were cast off, a feeling of dreaminess and desolation would set in. He continued a desultory conversation with Chang who walked beside him, and often broke into hearty laughter.

They had reached a corner only a few *ri* from Pak Chom Ji's inn. Lights twinkled across the millet field. The crescent moon hung low over the ears of millet. Stretching overhead like clouds was the Milky Way, resplendently ornamenting the vault of sky with countless full autumn stars. Sometimes a shooting star streaked, shining, over the horizon.

Suddenly, strange footsteps were heard from yonder. Then shouts broke the silence of the plain, followed by gunshots, obviously fired by Chu's scouts. In a flash, sensing imminent danger Chu Ho Rim drew his pistol, and leapt into a bush overgrown with mugworts to watch the situation. Chang followed, two adjutants flanking Chu. The firing increased.

"My God, the great plan had been spoiled," Chu Ho Rim moaned painfully with gloomy foreboding. "You take care of the front and the rear. Don't worry about me."

At this moment Chang struck a match and lit a cigarette. Immediately a dozen or so suspicious fellows darted out of the millet field across the road, Japanese police disguised as civilians.

"The Japs! Hit them."

There were only 20 to 30 paces in between when the fighting broke out. Chu Ho Rim and his men fired accurately. At the height of the shooting one of his adjutants approached him, saying, "Wouldn't it be better to withdraw and take shelter?"

"No, we won't. Wipe them out!" Chu Ho Rim's strong metallic voice carried some distance.

Fierce firing continued for several minutes. Then Chang, who had been smoking with one hand stuck into the front of his jacket, sprang up and pulled out a pistol. He shot the two adjutants flanking Chu Ho Rim. Then he pounced on him and grabbed Chu by the arms. Because of the suddenness of the attack, Chu Ho Rim was utterly defenceless and fell, face forward.

"Here he is. Here!" Chang turned round and called.

The enemies rushed up to the two grappling men and pulled them up.

"Chang, you bastard, you dog!"

Chu Ho Rim leapt at Chang like a mad beast. But the enemies were already twisting his arms.

"Listen, I'm not the Chang of yesterday. If you don't want to have a bullet in you, surrender yourself to Japan."

"God damn you dog. Chu Ho Rim will not surrender to the Japs."

Two gunshots were heard from Chang's hand. Chu Ho Rim clutched at his chest with his hands and tossed his head. Then he tottered a few paces forward and collapsed.

"You're going to cooperate with the Anti-Japanese Guerilla Army, aren't you?" said Chang, disdainfully, before plunging into the millet field. Chang had appeared on the scene to take part with Advisor Hwang in a plot to eliminate Chu Ho Rim who had been thinking of joining the guerrillas.

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Chu Ho Rim was lying on his bleeding chest, his arms spread out. His shoulders were heaving and his fingers clawing the dirt. Two soldiers who had come up belatedly after beating back the enemy raised their chief in their arms. He needed urgent first aid. They stuck a piece of cotton into the bullet wound and ran, taking turns to carry him on their backs.

Meanwhile, at Pak Chom Ji's inn the people had got up in hurried confusion; they had been unable to sleep because of a feeling that there were bandits around plundering, or that the Japanese were carrying out a "punitive operation". As soon as they recognized Chu Ho Rim as the wounded man the two young Independence Army soldiers had brought in, Pak Chom Ji and his wife cried out almost weeping, and busied themselves looking after him. They spread a mattress in a warm corner of their room, took off his coat and bathed the wound. Some people lit storm lamps and went out into the field to pick thistles that were said to be an effective styptic. Others brought pine resin to make ointment, lit the fire and put on a brass bowl of water. Still others ran to the well for more water to make honey-water for the wounded man to drink.

By morning, Chu Ho Rim had recovered consciousness. He felt very peaceful. Om Chi Hwan, a lanky Independence Army

soldier, heaved a sigh of relief as he smoked a cigarette on the earthen porch. Last night he had run 20 *ri* without a stop to fetch a doctor. Chu Ho Rim had asked his men not to make a fuss. He said there was no need to get in touch with his family and bluntly refused to have a doctor.

Pak Chom Ji, somewhat relieved, went in to see An Dong Hak in his room. The two sat facing each other, talking about Chu Ho Rim. Pak was indignant at the attack—the incident had been quite unexpected. An Dong Hak was anxious to help the wounded man, though he could not attend to him directly; he showed Pak how to look after the patient and gave him the best advice he could about medicine and ointments. And yet, he could not hide his disappointment at the problem the tragic accident would cause him. Reading his thoughts, Pak Chom Ji suggested that he should see the wounded man, inquire after his health and exchange a few words with him, since matters had turned out this way. An Dong Hak was in a dilemma, indeed. However important his own business, he could hardly put questions to a man hovering on the brink of death, but equally he could not return empty-handed after travelling a thousand *ri* and more. However, it struck him that he might be able to achieve the aim of his visit without meeting Chu Ho Rim now, so he told Pak that he would not impose himself on the wounded man. But Pak Chom Ji who was strongly inclined to meddle told the patient An Dong Hak's wish.

"You mean he came here to meet General Kum Song?" asked Chu Ho Rim through dry lips, after listening to Pak Chom Ji while lying on his back with eyes closed.

Chu Ho Rim said that if the matter concerned General Kum Song, he would see An Dong Hak even if he were breathing his last.

So An Dong Hak came to the patient's room. Chu Ho Rim lay on a thick mattress in the corner. As An Dong Hak lowered his head Chu responded to his bow with his eyes, raising his thick eyebrows. He did not look seriously wounded; only his irregular breathing and flushed face betrayed the bullet wound in his chest.

Having introduced himself, An Dong Hak asked after his health with the utmost concern. Then, after a polite exchange of words, Chu Ho Rim was the first to touch on the main subject, saying that he had heard of An Dong Hak from Pak Chom Ji, thus encouraging him to mention the purpose of the visit.

"I've come here to see you, Mr. Chu, to find out something about General Kum Song who was said to have come to this part of the country."

"About General Kum Song?" queried Chu with reverence in his tone.

"That's right."

Another moment of silence passed.

"Go ahead and ask me. I'll answer you as far as I can."

"Frankly, I have nothing definite to ask. I have travelled all summer trying to meet General Kum Song. I've walked thousands of *ri*. I was a Communist."

So saying An Dong Hak told him of all that had happened to him; he opened his heart, revealing everything that he had not told anybody else before; he believed that in his present situation Chu Ho Rim would be very frank and honest.

"My dearest wish is to meet General Kum Song, our people's great leader. So I came because I heard the General had been in this area."

Here he stopped, stealing a look to see the expression on Chu Ho Rim's face. Chu closed his eyes. Streaming in at the paper door the sun shed its bright rays on Chu Ho Rim's serious face showing out of the quilt, over which the shadow of death was already creeping. Chu Ho Rim stretched out his trembling hand and silently pushed his cigarette case towards the visitor. His every word, every movement looked so significant and austere, that the visitor could hardly refuse the offer. An Dong Hak lit a cigarette. Chu Ho Rim again closed his eyes and became absorbed in deep thought. He realized already that he was on the brink of death; that was why he had so readily agreed to see An Dong Hak.

At this moment Chu felt sublime tranquility descending on him, which, knowing he was about to die, surprised him. Probably this was the blankness that transcends everything. Ever since he had first visited the Chonma-san unit of the Independence Army, he had devoted his whole life to fighting for his country's independence. But now he felt that his life, filled with so many vicissitudes, had been in vain, that he would leave no trace behind him. Sleeping in the crevices of rocks pressing his flintlock against his chest, tramping through vast forests at night, arguing with patriots with a flushed face, propagating patriotism everywhere he went to collect war funds—all this was like the clouds floating in the infinite expanse of the blue

sky, that appeared and then disappeared again. And yet, he need not feel sorry about it now. Because, like An Dong Hak, he felt an immense joy that would overwhelm all his agonies, his bitter memories and his stupidities. To him who had dedicated his whole life to national independence, it was the greatest joy to realize clearly, though belatedly, now on the brink of death, that General Kum Song was advancing firmly in the van of thirty million Koreans, guiding the revolution and shouldering the destiny of a nation. Countless men had died, despite their life-long dedication to the country, without realizing this truth, without enjoying this pleasure. Therefore, Chu Ho Rim wanted to say that although among the unfortunate men of the Independence Army, he was at the same time unusually lucky.

His premonition of death left Chu Ho Rim free from prejudice, scepticism and conventional ideas and suddenly unfolded the living reality before his eyes. His thoughts took flight, unrestrained, and his beautiful sentiments brimmed over. Chu Ho Rim opened his eyes, bringing down to his side the hand that had been placed on his chest. Solemnity and strength shone in his eyes. His thick, bluish lips opened:

"Mr. An Dong Hak, I think you are a happier man than I. You have long realized what I've only seen at this late moment. You've seen it while your limbs are strong. You are lucky, indeed. Meet General Kum Song, come what may. You will meet him; all thirty million Koreans will be meeting him, I'm sure. You said you were a Communist, did you not? I do not know too much about communism. But I do know that the Communists are leading the fight to free our homeland. And what I've realized keenly here is that communism will demonstrate its true value, only when guided by General Kum Song. What do you think about it? I'm afraid what I'm saying sounds rather presumptuous. Because I'm a humble man, I'm a nationalist."

He paused as he struggled to regain his breath. Om Chi Hwan who had been seated by his side gave him a couple of spoonfuls of honey-water out of a bowl. As his throat was moistened, he lifted his feverish eyes and, gazing at An Dong Hak, went on:

"I don't care whether it be communism or nationalism. If you have no leader, you can't achieve anything. This I have recognized only now, when I am at the end of life. Who are the unfortunates? Uncivilized people are unfortunate, so are people oppressed by the Japanese barbarians. However, this is not the

full extent of unhappiness. You will be really unhappy if you have no leader. A people who are fortunate enough to have a leader may live under the yoke of barbarians or be far removed from civilization today but tomorrow they will be free, they will win independence and catch up with more civilized nations. Knowing this, I would say I have had a happy life. Long ago I had the honour to know Kim Hyong Jik, an outstanding leader of the Korean independence movement, and, under his leadership, dedicated my humble efforts to the cause of national liberation. And now I have met his son, General Kum Song. He is our leader, the leader of all thirty million. I had the opportunity, I saw him.... And oh, how stupid I was...."

His face flushed and he broke into a fit of convulsive coughing. It sounded as if he would cough up his very soul. Tears gathered in his eyes either from the coughing or from the painful memories. However, like a truly grave man, he firmly controlled the cough and stared up at the ceiling. Before his eyes he saw Comrade Kum Song's genial face.

"If you want to meet General Kum Song you need not come to a man like me to find out his whereabouts."

Chu Ho Rim said this in a low voice, turning his head to face An Dong Hak. In Chu Ho Rim's peculiar excitement on the verge of death and his every inspiring word, An Dong Hak could feel two agonies: the physical agony compelling him towards death and repentance over his mistake at the crucial moment of his life, an error he could not put right. An Dong Hak had nothing more to ask of Chu Ho Rim.

Om Chi Hwan again approached his commander with a spoonful of honey-water, but Chu Ho Rim shook his head.

Darkness was falling. Om Chi Hwan and two other soldiers were looking after their commander. Chu Ho Rim had been trying hard to retain consciousness which faded now and again. Suddenly Chang's malicious face loomed before his eyes and hundreds of pistols spat fire at him. He tried to drive them away, waving his hands, but his body would not obey. He saw his wife's expressionless face, his daughter's smile. In his delirium he caught a vivid glimpse of another scene, a scene eight years ago. He was sitting opposite Kim Hyong Jik in the main room of his house at Fusung. They were alone. Kim Hyong Jik, as usual, smiled kindly and invited him to smoke, and they lit their cigarettes. Now he was walking with Kim Hyong Jik past thousands of soldiers of the Independence Army. Kim Hyong Jik

laughed heartily. He too laughed, looking at him. But Kim Hyong Jik advances briskly by himself. He is trying to follow him but his feet will not shift. "Mr. Kim!" he shouts aloud....

"Please collect your mind, sir." Om Chi Hwan came close and gently shook his arm.

Chu Ho Rim abruptly opened his eyes. "Where am I? Where is Mr. Kim who was here just now?"

Only when he looked round the room did he realize that he had been delirious. Then he called Om Chi Hwan in a clear voice.

"Listen to me. I wanted to see my country independent, but now I know that it's impossible. You go to General Kum Song. When you meet him, convey my humble apologies. Fight well under his command, and liberate our country."

Om Chi Hwan and Myong Uk wiped their tears with the back of their clenched fists. An Dong Hak heaved a long, lingering sigh behind them. Time passed sadly and solemnly. Chu Ho Rim was now in deep anguish. No man can avoid his end, and at the last moment he leaves many things behind unfulfilled. Some leave great tasks that have a bearing on all humanity, others insignificant family affairs. It is sad, but inevitable and natural. Because the struggle goes on and life is never-ending. One feels a great agony, a tremendous grief at all the errors made in life, errors that are now too late to put right, and that no one can redeem for one. So to avoid the bitterest pain a human being can suffer at death, one must try to make as few mistakes as possible, and to correct them when one does make them.

Chu Ho Rim died. Om Chi Hwan burst into tears and wailed, striking the floor with his fists. The travellers wailed, too, and tears trickled down the cheeks of the inn-keeper and his wife. Enveloped in deep sorrow, An Dong Hak went outside. It was as gloomy as a graveyard. The wind rose and shook the millet field more fiercely than ever. It was a desolate and solemn night suited to the last day of a man who had had a chequered career and achieved much, made many mistakes and left many problems behind him.

The next day, a decrepit horse-cart rattled along through the plain where millet fields stretched as far as the eye could see. A gust of wind lifted the edge of the white sheet spread over the cart, as Chu Ho Rim's cold body returned along the

road he had walked only yesterday. The cart clattered along slowly, the monotonous sound echoing over the road stretching into the distance. It was followed by three soldiers of the Independence Army, guns on their shoulders. An Dong Hak plodded along on their right, holding his daughter's hand.

The day after he arrived at Tunghua An Dong Hak heard some shocking news: an Independence Army soldier called Om Chi Hwan had shot Advisor Hwang and vanished with some of his platoon members.

A few days later An Dong Hak started north again.

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Cha Gi Yong and Pak Hung Dok had been walking for three days since the Comrade Commander had given them their assignments at Ssoksae Valley.

Cha Gi Yong was going to the Taegok Mine in North Hamgyong Province and Pak Hung Dok was on his way to Lohsing to set up a semi-guerrilla zone. Like the roots of a huge luxuriant tree creeping in the subterranean darkness, they had to turn their backs on the treetops soaring into the sky.

Since the founding of the guerrilla army Comrade Kum Song had strengthened it and also stepped up the work he had arranged long ago—operations in the homeland and underground activities in the enemy-held areas as well as work on semi-guerrilla zones. This was particularly important in the light of the enemy's full-scale "punitive operations" against guerrilla bases. The liberated areas had to be protected by the semi-guerrilla zones and communications had to be maintained with revolutionary organizations in enemy-controlled areas, especially in other parts of the country. This meant that the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army had to have a firmer mass foundation. Comrade Kum Song had likened their mission to the roots of a tree.

Cha Gi Yong had another day's walk ahead. Then he would go by train towards Chongjin along the Tuman-gang River. He was going to the mine, where he must first settle. Then he would have to contact the organizations at Hamhung, Wonsan, Unggi and other major industrial districts. Pak Hung Dok would cross

Huangluling Pass, and press on through the Toljae area to a valley behind Wangching. Cha Gi Yong had left Liangkang a day before Pak Hung Dok. But two days later, they had accidentally met on the road. They had decided to go along together for a day, for once they parted, there was no knowing when they would meet again. Cha Gi Yong looked like a worker in his rough green suit and canvas shoes with his head held a little to one side. No one would suspect him of being anything else. Pak Hung Dok was equally well disguised; he wore hemp trousers stained with red muddy water, a pair of hempcord sandals and had a towel tied round his head. With a net bag slung on his shoulder he walked without hurry, his feet wide apart somewhat, just like an elderly farm hand.

Walking along the road they talked ceaselessly about their lives as guerrillas. Neither had expected to leave their unit only five months after joining. Neither had dreamt that he would ever leave his unit till their land was free. Every day in those five months had shown them some new aspect of life, it had all been quite beyond their imagination. That was why they had lived in a state of excitement every day and found their lives worth living. And they had felt greatly honoured, very happy at being close to Comrade Kum Song, the Korean people's great leader. It was because of him that they could carry on the revolution, could see their future and feel proud of their life. Now they were leaving this happiness behind, going farther and farther away.

Maple leaves rolled down the road like flames, busily rustling in search of cosy hollows. Yellow ash leaves scattered like a flock of chickens. Autumn in the North was really beautiful. The mountainsides were dressed in scarlet maples, dark green *punbi*, yellow larches, and silver white poplars and aspens against a boundless, pale blue sky.

"But you looked quite composed when the Comrade Commander gave you your assignment, Comrade Cha."

"What else could I do then? It's an awfully important task. Should I have told him that I didn't want to leave the unit, despite months of political education?"

This took them back to when they had received their assignments from the Comrade Commander.

When Cha Gi Yong had arrived at headquarters Pak Hung Dok was already there. Between the two guerrillas, half a step behind them, Comrade Kum Song strolled slowly through the forest. Russet maple leaves rustled softly underfoot. Among the

larch-trees were the occasional maples and aspens throwing their mottled shadows of twilight on the dank earth.

He walked with one hand on the shoulder of each of the two comrades, talking and occasionally stooping to pick a blade of grass. First he asked after their health. Both said that they were fine, and he paused and made Pak Hung Dok take off his shoes.

"You have flat feet, haven't you? No, don't tell me a lie. Since you have walked the whole day today you must have sore feet. Take off your shoes. Come on."

After some hesitation Pak Hung Dok could not get out of taking off his left shoe. The sole and the tip of the big toe were red with blisters that had burst. Comrade Kum Song sat down on a fallen tree and took out a matchbox. He ground a few match-heads into powder, put it on the blisters and struck a match to burn it. Pak Hung Dok felt a sting and gave out a moan, screwing up his face. Then he felt so ashamed he flushed all over. Comrade Kum Song said he used to walk long distances before, working to revolutionize the villages, and he had kindly taught him how to treat a foot sore. Of course, it was not the first time Pak had heard this. But he was deeply grateful to the Comrade Commander for holding his foot and treating it in person.

Then it was Cha Gi Yong's turn.

"I'm perfectly all right, Comrade Commander."

"Yes, you are as tough as a birch. No worm can eat into you."

Silence followed. Darkness had crept up on the deep forest and veiled the ground underfoot, and birds were fluttering their wings here and there as they settled in their nests. Presently he gazed into Cha's face, and in a calm voice, said: "You must not doze." At his words, Cha Gi Yong gave a start, as though electrified. He would never forget that night when he had dozed off while on sentry duty.

"At your sentry post you must never doze, come what may. The enemy wants us to doze off. Where is your home?"

"I have no home."

"No home? But you were born and bred somewhere, weren't you?"

"I was born in Namwon, Cholla Province, but I didn't spend my childhood in one place. My father wandered about the country, carrying me on his A-frame carrier. He died when I

was seven and since then I have worked, wandering about all over Korea."

"Then your home is the homeland. In some countries home and homeland are the same word. Good. Because to you, to gain a home, to go home to your village, means recovering the homeland, you must work harder and fight better than anybody else."

He stopped walking and squatted on a grassy spot. Cha Gi Yong and Pak Hung Dok sat down beside him. Now he referred to their assignments: Cha Gi Yong was to slip quietly into the areas controlled by the Japanese to arouse the working class and organize resistance, and recruit activists for the guerrilla army, and to mobilize the working people to create a dependable rear for guerrilla warfare. Pak Hung Dok was to go to the villages and set up a semi-guerrilla zone. Here, unlike the liberated areas, the enemy would be ostensibly left to rule, but a number of revolutionary organizations formed underground would virtually control the zone. On the surface, the enemy would seem to be in the saddle, while in practice, it would be a guerrilla zone where power was in our hands. He continued:

"How should man live? And what does he live for? People think about these problems sometimes.

"Anyone who is alive inevitably comes up against this sort of question, one simply cannot evade it. I imagine this question is so important that many thinkers in all countries and all ages have written and left many words, trying to find the right answer. A European, for instance, wrote: 'I have not the least desire to sacrifice myself for other people. I am not subject to anyone but myself. I only want to live for myself and claim the right to enjoy the world.' If man lives only to seek pleasure, he is no better than an animal."

His voice had risen a little and his eyes flashed with disgust.

"Seeking pleasure is the aggressor's philosophy. Our objectives are entirely different from theirs. We are living for class and national liberation, which is the highest cause for all mankind. Our life's aim is to free the working class and oppressed peoples, and, more than that, to free the working men and women from backbreaking labour and thus from the pain caused by society and nature.

"Our reward for this is the noble name revolutionary; this is our happiness, our honour.

"This name is a far greater honour than a gilt-edged letter of citation or a shining medal. And even death is glorious on this road.

"What do you think about it? When sometimes your target is unclear or you meet hardships in your work, just ask yourselves if you are on the road to free the people, are serving their interests, that is all. Ours is no easy struggle. We must meet Jap imperialism with force, and we must also overwhelm them with our sublime spirit. The Jap imperialists are attacking us with high-speed rotary printing presses with immense capacity, with highly efficient radios and with many hired mouths and pens. They shower us with ugly calumny. Our position is different. We have to mimeograph pamphlets and handbills, or copy out the manuscripts by hand, often working through the night. We have to break through a bristling sea of bayonets to meet even one comrade. We have to meet people secretly, one at a time, in a living room, at a pit or at a wharf; we can't speak out loud, we have to whisper.

"Then why are the odds on our side? It is clear. The enemies are telling lies and mouthing injustices at the top of their voices, while we speak about truth and justice. The more noise they make, the more they show their falsity, whereas our every word, our every handbill and each of our comrades will touch the heartstrings of millions. Communist ideology is great enough to break through anything. What do you say? You think you can do it? If you fight well, you can cause explosions right under the enemy's feet. So, shall we walk on?"

He rose to his feet and the two guerrillas followed suit. They came out of the forest and found themselves on the crest of the mountain. The undulating hills starting from Mt. Paekdusan were lying at their feet. After standing a few moments in meditation he said quietly.

"In some ways, underground work is interesting. I once worked in the villages, in disguise. It was very interesting looking up at society from the very bottom, while in hiding."

Pak Hung Dok gave Cha Gi Yong a meaning look. What the Comrade Commander had said reminded him of an incident in Liangkang last spring. Cha Gi Yong nodded imperceptibly in approval. Bringing his hand to the back of his neck, Pak Hung Dok asked the Comrade Commander if he could ask him a question.

"Of course. What is it?"

Smiling, he again put a hand on the shoulder of each of the two guerrillas.

"Oh, it's not very important. But, Comrade Commander, did you ever disguise yourself as a servant to do your underground work?..."

"Servant? Ha, ha. What makes you think that?"

"That night when you spoke at Liangkiang, a woman said that the man who used to work as a servant at her village had become the guerrilla commander. I told her not to talk nonsense, but she insisted that it was true."

Comrade Kum Song burst out laughing, tossing his head.

"So she gave away my secret, eh? Ha, ha, ha."

His boisterous laugh reverberated through the forest.

They walked back slowly from the forest, as the whole company was gathering to see a performance. Though other members of the company thought it would be the same sort of performance as usual, Chon Gwang Sik attached special importance to this particular gathering. He knew that Cha Gi Yong and Pak Hung Dok would be leaving the following day and he wanted to make tonight a memorable evening for them. There were songs and dances, and Se Gol did some conjuring tricks. He had drawn a moustache under his nose, and after making a fluent advertising speech like a real medicine peddler, he did some conjuring tricks. He took out a bullet and swallowed it. Then, going out towards the audience, he put some nose grease on the tip of his finger and, giving a yell, pulled a bullet out from under his sole. When he repeated the trick, some of the audience spotted that his dexterous hand had pushed the bullet into his cap. While he was turning round, putting the nose grease on his fingertip, Chin Bong Nam sneaked up and took it, so that the conjurer could not pull it out from under his sole at the third try, and the audience held their sides laughing.

Then came the wrestling matches. Guerrillas with sturdy limbs and broad shoulders grappled with each other. Everyone watched them struggling in breathless suspense. Among others, the match between Cha Gi Yong and Pak Hung Dok was very exciting. Pak Hung Dok, bending his body and slowly turning crosswise, gave a sudden push to hook his opponent's leg with his. Failing, he changed his tactics instantly and tried to trip Cha Gi Yong. Broad-shouldered Cha Gi Yong tottered and drew back, but stood his ground, with his legs spread apart. This posture made Pak Hung Dok utterly helpless despite his dex-

terity and cunning. Cha Gi Yong was quicker and more decisive. As he swiftly pulled his rival to the left, Cha Gi Yong lifted Pak Hung Dok shoulder high. Then he found himself in a predicament. Though suspended in mid-air, Pak Hung Dok was stretching his feet to hook his opponent's knees, so he could not be lifted up or thrown off.

"Lift him up a bit. Higher...."

"Throw him down and give a hook!"

"Throw him over your shoulder!"

"Trip him up, I say."

Everyone was shouting so loud that it was almost impossible to ascertain who was backing whom. Se Gol was making the biggest clamour. He was up on his feet, circling round and shouting out advice to both opponents. When one of the wrestlers was in danger he would run to him and make suggestions with words and even gestures, almost as if he was going to join the match himself. All the guerrillas were shouting out, some clapping their hands or stamping their feet. Women guerrillas cheered, their faces all aglow. Yong Suk and Myong Ok were on Pak Hung Dok's side while Hye Yong and Ok Nyo supported Cha Gi Yong. When Pak Hung Dok was drawn to the opponent, Yong Suk, patting the shoulders of a man in the front row, gasped out: "Come on! Push him hard!" And when the situation changed in Pak Hung Dok's favour, she heaved a sigh of relief. Meanwhile, when Cha Gi Yong was driven hard, Hye Yong and Ok Nyo would clutch their breasts, shrieking, "Oh, my Goodness, how terrible! Oh, oh!"

The match lasted a long time. Now Pak Hung Dok was trying to wear down his opponent. Once in a while he tried to hook the other's legs, but he was only feinting. Cha Gi Yong remained still, and seeing through the opponent's weaknesses, he made strong attacks. Presently Cha Gi Yong who had been spreading his legs, sprang up, at the same time making a movement as if to give a belly-grab, and shoving his rival forward, suddenly got him by the neck. Pak Hung Dok fell down, both of his feet tripped. There was an uproar. Hye Yong jumped for joy like a child.

This was a match in three rounds. Losing the first round Pak Hung Dok thrust his leg between his opponent's and stretched. Pushing his head under Cha Gi Yong's chin, he held himself up and raised his leg. His leg hooked, Cha Gi Yong tried to arch up, throwing back his head, but he was too late. Rais-

ing his strong leg, Pak Hung Dok succeeded in swinging Cha Gi Yong's body. He leaned slowly and fell backwards with a thud. Again there was an uproar....

"What are you thinking about so hard, Comrade Pak?" Cha Gi Yong said, slapping Pak Hung Dok on the shoulder. Pak Hung Dok who had been wrapped in thought grinned and said that he had been remembering the teachings of the Comrade Commander. Cha Gi Yong couldn't help grinning, too, because he had been thinking about the same thing. Then they talked about the Comrade Commander, as they walked along the track across Huangluling Pass. Since they had been in the same company they could talk about incidents and episodes that both knew. When Cha Gi Yong remembered one thing, Pak Hung Dok would add another, which would take them on to other subjects. They reminded each other how, during the march through the deep woodlands around Mt. Paekdu-san, the Comrade Commander would bind notebooks out of white paper at every halt, how Cha dozed off on sentry duty, how popular Chin Bong Nam had become when he caught a bear, how Pak Hung Dok had written out a bond stating that the provisions would be repaid within three years, how Cha Gi Yong had had a hard time at Chonsangdegi. In the short time they had been with the guerrillas they had had more experiences and more to remember than they had had in their whole life before joining the guerrilla army.

By the time it was dusk, they had already crossed the mountain and had discussed whether to part now or spend another night together. Cha Gi Yong had suggested.

"Let us part now. Then we will meet again the sooner."

"Yes, let's."

And like small children, they embraced, their eyes blurred with tears.

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Ten days after saying good-bye to Pak Hung Dok, Cha Gi Yong arrived at the Taegok Coal Mine. He had taken a roundabout way to avoid the enemy's watchful eye, which had taken twice as long. He climbed a knoll from where he had a bird's

eye view of the mining town, and mopped the sweat from his brow. Though it was autumn, he was hot after his long walk. A slag heap towered in the middle like a black dunce cap and dirty streets spread out around it. Dark smoke rose ceaselessly from chimneys, big and small, and there was a continuous buzzing noise like a whole hive of bees. The breeze carried sulphur fumes. The disorderly streets, loosely built frame houses, eating houses, caves, winches, and miners walking about, grinning or with sullen faces were all very familiar. When he entered the town, he immediately made his way to a string of eating houses and stopped in front of an oblong house. Several pairs of shoes black with coal dust, lay on the threshold.

"Is the master in?" he called out in a loud voice, but there was no answer.

"Is the master in?" Raising his chin, he shouted louder still. Then the crooked kitchen door banged open and a bony black face appeared.

"What?"

It was a rough worker's voice.

"Excuse me, but are you the master?"

"Why, you are as tenacious as a peasant. You know I am, I come at your call."

"Ha, ha. I see. Have you a room to spare?"

Cha Gi Yong was being shrewd.

"I have one, but it's crowded with coffins," said the owner of the eating house, apparently in blank dismay and spat on the yard. First Cha Gi Yong was confused, not knowing if the master was joking or not, but then he heard a coarse voice shouting.

"Bottoms up!"

"You can't drink in the land beyond the grave."

"Are you going to just sit with folded arms while men are dying like flies?"

"Life is just like an empty dream."

"Shut up and drink quick."

Cha Gi Yong pulled a face.

"You heard that? Why do you pull a face, young man?" The owner looked at the visitor with disgust, his breath smelling of wine.

"You know how much the three men should have paid me for their two months' boarding? I'm completely broke. Utterly broke, I tell you." Cha Gi Yong stood speechless, and waited

for him to calm down. Then a tough character in dark clothes came staggering out of the door.

"What the hell are you hanging around here for? You should go if you're told there's no room. Men are dying, being fired and beaten, and you're going to stick your nose into this lawless mess, you young fool?" He stopped in front of Cha Gi Yong, breathing liquor. With penetrating eyes, Cha Gi Yong stared him in the face.

"You've got your eyes in the right place, anyway, young fellow." He mumbled, looking Cha up and down. Even to his intoxicated eyes, Cha Gi Yong looked as solidly built as steel. His slanting eyes had an inspired look about them and his hands were thick and strong. He did not look like a tramp straying into the place. The tough fellow felt drawn to the stranger, for some unknown reason.

"How long have you worked in the mines?"

"My bones were hardened by carrying coal on my back."

"Hum, you are a smart guy, eh? Have a smoke." He fumbled in his pockets and pulled out a packet of *Macaw*, and offered them to Cha Gi Yong. They sat down on the earthen porch and introduced themselves. Maeng Son Hak blurted that the mine was a burial ground; and he told him that the day before, on the day shift the pit roof had fallen in, killing three of the men. One had his back broken, another was buried alive under the coal and a third had a fractured skull. When the miners protested that the management should have installed more props, the taskmasters struck them in the face and threatened them, saying: "Stop the fuss. Sometimes men get killed while making money. There is nothing unusual in that. And if you create about it, you'll go to jail." A dozen or so miners who were beaten had been dismissed because they had insisted that they could not work in such a dangerous place. His clenched fists trembling, Maeng Son Hak poured out foul blasphemies, calling the Japanese "sons of bitches", "cloven hoofs", "God damn bastards" and "wooden clogs".

"Well, what are you going to do?" asked Cha Gi Yong anxiously.

"What are we going to do? We are going to drink today and take them out to the graveyard tomorrow. That's all. I'm sure they've families but we don't know their addresses and can't let them know. And if we do send their kinfolk a letter or telegram, what's the use? It's terrible! And it's the same for us

workers everywhere. They don't know that only death awaits them, and they keep coming to places like this just like you. It's really terrible. Life is just like the pit. Yes, a black pit with a dead end. Here in this town more than a thousand workers are swarming the pits. The situation is the same everywhere in Korea, and sooner or later we all end up over there...." He nodded in the direction of the graveyard on the mountainside opposite.

Smoking two cigarettes one after another Cha Gi Yong barely managed to keep his peace of mind. He would have liked to encourage the miners right now to go on strike, to attack the Japanese with hammers, picks, to make revolution, but he had to suppress his fierce emotion. His comrades had criticized him for extremism which they called the hastiness of the weak, and he had been trying to overcome this fault. So he decided to say nothing reckless. However, he could not hide his excitement completely, for both his face and body betrayed his feelings. His firm chin trembled slightly, the veins on his neck were pulsating quickly and a deep flush suffused his face. His pitch-black eyebrows moved convulsively. After the eating house owner had disappeared into the kitchen, Cha Gi Yong spoke in a deliberately lowered voice.

"Look here, Brother Maeng. Are we the workers going to meekly drop the fists that have been raised?"

"Well, we have no other choice."

"But we must go into the tiger's den, if we want to take the cub."

"How can we do that with bare hands?"

"Once we unite, we can bring down whole mountains. Look at the slag heap. We brought that out on our backs."

"Mm, you're quite a man! Let's go inside and have a real heart-to-heart talk."

"Splendid, but first I'll have to get a job and fix myself up with lodgings, man."

"By Jove, don't be so cowardly; you are a grown man. Come on."

Feigning reluctance, Cha Gi Yong went into the room. Against one wall three white coffins were neatly placed in a row. They smelled of fresh resin. On the offertory table were a wine cup, a few dried pollack and an incense bowl. This was all the living had to offer the dead. Several miners with glistening faces who had been drinking at a small dining table moved up to make room for the guest. On entering, Cha Gi Yong poured

wine into the wine cup, kindled incense and went down on his knees. He did not know the names, ages or homes of the deceased. But they were workers, and that was what gripped Cha Gi Yong's heart and made him bow before them. He raised his head and straightened himself up, then again got down on his knees and again rose to his feet. Having made three bows according to the local custom, he stepped back and bowed gravely to those who were in the room.

"I guess this is enough; all of us are chief mourners here. Now let's have a talk. Let me introduce this young man. He is from my home village." Maeng Son Hak invented a story. A big-eyed fellow who was sitting across from Cha Gi Yong held out the lid of a rice bowl and filled it with wine out of a one-doe bottle.

"Now, empty this. A late comer must drink three cups, as the saying goes."

Cha Gi Yong felt a sudden yearning in the pit of his stomach and swiftly brought the bowl to his mouth. Then his hand stiffened and stopped still. He must not drink. He remembered what the Comrade Commander had said while walking in the forest. Cha Gi Yong put the bowl on the table and picked up a piece of *kimchi* pickle.

"What's the matter?"

"I don't drink."

"My, you don't look like a beginner. You can't melt the coal-dust in your lungs without this."

"My family have never drunk right from grandfather down."

"Oh, you are from a posh family, aren't you? A miner who doesn't drink is like a coal truck without wheels."

In the evening when the conversation drifted on to how to hold the funeral service, Cha Gi Yong made a proposal in an unpretentious manner: We workers are the chief mourners. So we must give them a better funeral than their families would have done. The funeral must not be stripped of the formalities just because the dead are workers and have no chief mourners. Streamers inscribed with their full names must be prepared, and funeral poems. The material for the streamers should be red, for that is striking. It could be got if each of the 46 miners lodging in this eating house contributed a little bit of money. The coffins should be carried out for burial at twelve noon, but not straight to the graveyard. First they should be carried down

the street where the deceased used to walk, past the entrance to the mine and the dump.

Cha Gi Yong's proposal immediately moved the miners. So used to oppression and sorrow were they, the intention had been to hold a short funeral to bury yet another tragic incident, to send it quickly into oblivion; unlike Cha Gi Yong they had not valued the workers. And when one man had said that loss of human life should not be treated lightly, he had been regarded as a nuisance and a crank.

After listening to Cha Gi Yong's proposal, an old miner of over 50 shed tears of sorrow and told how Koreans used to hold funeral services. From olden times, when they heard wailing for the dead or shrieks at a bandit, or fire, the whole neighbourhood would come out to comfort the bereft family or help the victims to regain their property. The old man added that when a man died, the spirit of the dead would be invoked first, the food for the dead prepared, the bottom lining board of the coffin (which has seven holes in the pattern of the Great Bear—Tr.) made, the body covered with material, and the coffin carried on a bier to the sound of the coffin-bearers' sorrowful dirge, and men and women, young and old, would come out to bid farewell to the dead, shedding tears. The old miner's story made everyone in the room feel sadder, and determined to do everything possible to hold a proper funeral; the men even said that the funeral was their business.

The funeral took place the next day. It was the most spectacular service that had ever taken place since the mine was first opened. Not because there were so many streamers with funeral odes or the biers so splendid, but because hundreds of miners formed a procession and followed the coffins to the graveyard. After the coffins had been lowered, everyone lined up and bowed his head to offer up a silent prayer. Maeng Son Hak made a speech that Cha Gi Yong had prepared for him, and many people wept and clenched their fists that day.

Thus began Cha Gi Yong's activity at the Taegok Mine. Employed as a digger, he would get through his work as quickly as he could, go to other pits to help his colleagues and to do propaganda for the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army. Before long one of the pits came under his organization. He had set up the Association to Aid the Revolution to support the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army. It was similar to Anti-Japanese Associations in other areas. Soon the associations would have to send sturdy

youths to the guerrilla army, get hold of explosives and collect money to get the things the guerrillas needed.

Meanwhile, Cha Gi Yong was engaged in energetic anti-Japanese propaganda. He explained that until Japanese imperialism was overthrown, the workers would not be emancipated and that the workers must lead the revolution to build a socialist society free from oppression and exploitation. He often held meetings at a secret place in a pit. First, discussions were arranged on "Why are the workers poor?", "How did the Japanese imperialists occupy Korea?", "What is revolution?", "What is socialism?", etc. Then, he explained things and presided over discussions on "What is to be done to overthrow Japanese imperialism?", "The Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army is the workers and peasants' revolutionary army" and so on. Among other things Cha Gi Yong put heart and soul into telling them about General Kum Song. He told the miners everything he knew about the General, and sometimes scattered handbills.

One morning the streets were suddenly thrown into a turmoil. Mounted police were rushing down the streets and the armed border constabularies were manning the Tuman-gang river bank. The night before handbills had been pasted on the walls of the police station and hundreds of handbills scattered in the market place. One, entitled "Let's Overthrow Japanese Imperialism," urged all Koreans to rise, and the other, with a big headline, "General Kum Song, Great Sun of Our Nation, Formed the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army," predicted that the Japanese imperialists would soon be wiped out by the guerrilla army and that Korea would win independence. Both handbills called on all workers to help the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army.

After his work down at the pit Cha Gi Yong was approaching the checkpoint with a metal hand lamp when he saw that every miner was being closely searched by armed policemen who had been waiting at the corner of the street. The result was that more than a thousand miners, their families and townsfolk heard all about the handbills. The town was seething. In every house, at every street-corner, in every tunnel, the people talked about General Kum Song. A few days later there was a rumour that General Kum Song had rode round the town on horseback at the head of countless Korean soldiers. Going in and out of the pit with the hand lamp in his hand, his eyes glittering in his blackened face, Cha Gi Yong was planning to get a strike going as soon as a good excuse cropped up. And yet, he longed

for the guerrilla life. On his wooden pillow in a room of the boarding house, gazing up at the ceiling covered with spider's webs, amid the acrid smell of sulphur, he would think about his life as a guerrilla. Where would the headquarters be now? Se Gol, Pyon In Chol, Chin Bong Nam, Yong Taek, and the girls—Yong Suk, Myong Ok, Hye Yong and Ok Nyo—and Han Hung Su, Chon Gwang Sik, Chin Il Man; where were they, what were they doing now? Marching through a forest or busying themselves getting ready to pitch camp? Most of all he wanted to know about Pak Hung Dok, who was always smiling and had such immense vitality. Where is this snub-nosed friend now? Has he really been hired by a landlord? When will I see them all again and stroll through a forest and remember what they are doing now?

"Comrade Commander, Cha Gi Yong, member of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army, is standing at his post, and not dozing off," he said to himself, abruptly sitting up on his bed; he saw the smiling Comrade Commander. A little later he went down to the secret meeting place, holding his hand lamp.

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Cha Gi Yong received the news three days later, although he had sent a telegram from Hoeryong.

"Hey! You calledo Cha Gi Yongu, so?" asked Okada, a Japanese taskmaster. He appeared at the pit with a metal hand lamp with glittering reflector and wielded his small hammer as though about to poke in the belly of Cha Gi Yong, who was busy chiselling a hole in the wall.

"Mister Supervisor, I'm afraid you'll drive a hole in my guts."

"You too muchi words, you bastardo. Why you no answer, you stupid you."

Thrusting the sledgehammer between the props, Cha Gi Yong asked the Japanese what he wanted.

"I gotto telegram. Says you mother dead."

"What?"

He pretended to be stunned. He was thrilled that his trick had worked, but he had to express shock and grief, which was

no easy thing to do. However, pulling a grief-stricken face and biting his tongue, he turned round and shrieked, "Mother!" covering his face with both hands. Once the taskmaster was thoroughly deceived, he spread the rumour at the boarding house and set out on a trip, saying that he would visit his home at Chongpyong.

He dropped in at Chongjin. Comrade Pak, an underground organizer, who had been dispatched there earlier, had been carrying out his task pretty well, working at the wharf as a labourer. He spent a night and a day in a huge concrete pipe that a few unemployed used as a shelter, and handed him messages and conveyed the news of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army. Comrade Pak had come to this place right after the Mingyueh-kou Meeting and had been working underground, so he had no news since.

Then Cha Gi Yong went straight to Hungnam by train. From the station he walked along the shore where construction projects were going ahead full swing. The harbour was being built and the fertilizer factory expanded. Sand and gravel were heaped everywhere and earth excavated. The workers were bustling about putting up scaffolding.

"Out of the way! Out! The truck's coming!"

A hand truck came rattling down the steep slope, swaying along a roughly built rail. The man driving it slipped as he pulled the brake and fell backwards and the towel tied round his head was about to go flying through the air. From the top of a knoll Cha Gi Yong saw the dirt splattering up and in an instant, there was a crash and the man, truck and brake flew up into the air in different directions.

"He's injured!"

An unknown voice raised a shout which rang through the busy construction site. With Maeng Son Hak's shabby soft hat on askew and a towel round his neck, Cha Gi Yong hurried across the place to get out into the street. In the narrow street of the city there was a motley crowd jostling between the watchmakers, barber shops and drinking houses that stood cheek by jowl; flashy signboards such as *Jintan*, *Pak's Face Powder*, *Chujoto* (Japanese medicine for a woman's ailment—Tr.) dwarfed the frame houses lining either side of the street. A Japanese in a *haori* coat rode a bicycle through the crowd, a harlot strolled down the street in her long skirt, giving off the heavy scent of powder and casting voluptuous glances left and

right. And miserable beggar boys asked a gentleman with a walking stick for alms, and dropping their hands dejectedly, turned away. A revolting sickly crooner's voice could be heard from the tinny gramophone in a watchmaker's. The beating of drums, occasionally mingled with the wanton laughter of women, were heard from a dilapidated two-storied house with bamboo blinds covered with black fly droppings.

He had a little way to go yet to meet Comrade Hong. Unbuttoning his tunic and fanning himself with the felt hat, he turned the corner, only to find the side street blocked with a line of straw rope, in front of which a lanky fellow in a straw hat stood shouting to a crowd of pedestrians. He was dressed exactly like a Japanese but he was speaking in Korean.

"You are encouraged to put on coloured clothes. One of the reasons why you Koreans are poor is that you dress yourselves in white. White clothes wear out twice as fast as coloured ones, and they need more soap and erh...."

This straw-hatted gentleman had a huge brush which he was dipping into a tin of black ink; he kept grabbing passers-by and splashing or painting ink on their *turumagi*, skirts or jackets.

"You swine!" An old man, in a white threadbare *turumagi* yellowed with age, rushed at the straw-hatted fellow, with blood-shot eyes and wielding a long pipe. The black fluid was dripping from the front of his *turumagi*.

"You bastard! I put on white or black clothes, it's none of your business. What the hell are you talking about, you son of a bitch? You want to make me rich, you say? You dirty barbarian!"

"What's the matter, old man? You want to spend your last days in jail? Don't you know this is a magnanimous policy introduced by His Excellency Governor-General for the benefit of you white-clad people...."

At this moment a Japanese policeman who had been standing nearby, with a sabre at his side and in long leggings, stepped forward, grabbed the old man by the beard and dragged him into a tent.

"Oh, my God, help me! Help me, my God!"

The painful groans of the old man which were sinking into his throat came out of the tent following the sound of slapping apparently at his face. Cha Gi Yong could hardly control his

rage. If he had had a gun, he would have leapt into the tent and shot those vicious bastards, despite the consequences.

Arriving at the hill behind the boarding house where Comrade Hong was said to be staying, he looked down at the streets of Hungnam, beating his chest in grief. This was a glimpse of the homeland. As a homeless people you are dogged by ordeals at every step and almost suffocated by cruel racial humiliation. The Japanese way of life is creeping like oil, besmirching your national dignity. This is a stifling, dirty, blind land where a bloody fight is afoot.

Cha Gi Yong's ears were clearly ringing with what Chon Gwang Sik had told him so simply and so well as they marched through the forest after leaving Chonsangdegi, about the characteristics of the present time: In ancient times, men died of hunger, in the Middle Ages they were mowed down by epidemics. But today men starve to death and suffer because they have produced too much. The ulcer of capitalism called "economic panic" which emerged out of the Stock Exchange right in the middle of New York where once bakeries were lined up has gradually swollen into a "monstrous colossus" with a mighty power. This "monster" jumps from continent to continent, devastating factories and farms, mountain hamlets and fishing villages, forests and plains. Workers are thrown out into the street and the peasants give up their land to wander about the country. Multi-millionaires are deranged because their bank accounts are shrinking, and the jobless are starving while boiler-rooms burn wheat instead of coal. Sceptical now about the nature of man, so-called distinguished philosophers browse through outworn Malthusian literature from the back of their bookshelves, trying to apply jungle law to human life, while great actresses join the queue of prostitutes to get jobs in a whorehouse. "War! War!" The press and radios are yelling this monosyllable scores of times a day as though a way out had been found. The fuses are burning inch by inch towards powder kegs, one in the West and the other in the East.

Japan, the first ignition point, is shouting the slogan "To Korea! To Korea!" unceasingly sending men, commodities and the noose of enslavement across the Korean Strait. Seizing this opportunity the zaibatsu-controlled munitions industries are frantically raking up cheap manpower.

Chon Gwang Sik had been to Pyongyang, Seoul and Hamhung. Now all that Cha Gi Yong had seen on this day with his

own eyes enabled him to understand what Chon Gwang Sik had meant. The whole world is in labour to give birth to a new child—revolution.

Around midnight, Cha Gi Yong met Hong Il Hwan and went into his boarding house.

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Hong Il Hwan's hideout was in a concrete sewage pipe by the shore. Like Comrade Pak in Chongjin, he was one of the organizers who had been sent to various parts of the country right after the Mingyuehkou Meeting. Hong Il Hwan was a cheerful man with big eyes. He was working at the boarding house as a labourer, fetching water and chopping firewood. This was better than working on the building sites because he had more opportunity to talk to workers and the police was less watchful of the boarding house. While copying handbills with a brush, Hong Il Hwan said with a laugh that he was writing letters with brush for the first time in years. He had been disguising himself as an illiterate here. Under a board covered with straw bags, the stinking water gurgled and from the concrete wall on which a lamp was hung the water dripped down all the time. Cha Gi Yong had conveyed Comrade Kum Song's best wishes to Hong. So, while writing letters, he occasionally talked to Cha in a voice charged with emotion, his face still flushed with excitement.

"I'm sure you have had no headache such as I have here, Comrade Three. I have made two reports so far, and I've had no news at all. There was a rumour that a guerrilla army had been founded, but I was not sure, you see? Sometimes I have an urge to visit there but can't leave this place and...."

"I understand how you feel, Comrade Five. I left the unit not long ago but I'm dying to hear from them...."

They used numbers instead of names for greater security. Since he was not a good talker, Cha Gi Yong told him haphazardly about the founding of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army, about the long march through the areas near the Amnok-gang River, and then revealed the purpose of his visit here: to tell all the Korean people of this historic event—the founding of the

Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army—as soon as possible. They had to copy the handbills and manifesto one by one, sitting up through the night, because they were not yet ready for a duplicator. His own experience at the Taegok Mine told Cha Gi Yong that there would be a tremendous reaction for sure once the news had travelled throughout this great industrial city and he was thrilled at the idea. They copied again and again until daybreak. When the morning sun rising out of the East Sea cast its first dim light into the mouth of the sewage pipe, they stopped working and went out into the street. They had not finished yet but they had to leave before daylight.

Hong Il Hwan reeled into the boarding house like a drunk, picked up the yoke and went out for water. On his way he ran into Chong, the owner of the boarding house, who was one of the taskmasters of the Kiyohara Team that was undertaking a construction project here and also a police agent.

“Why, you’re up early, you lucky toad. Do you need more pocket money?” he asked, taking his long ivory cigarette holder out of his mouth. Hong Il Hwan was a rather stockily-built man and his working tunic almost reached down to his knees. He was incredibly shabby but looked a gentle-hearted fellow who knew only work.

“While you feed me, I don’t need money. When I go to visit my home village, I hope you’ll give me some for the trip.”

“You do need money. Don’t you want to get married to a pretty gal?”

“Nobody will refuse to get married, sir.”

Meanwhile, Cha Gi Yong, disguised as a day labourer, was lying down in the boarding house. Though he was wakeful he had to close his eyes and snore. He was surrounded by men. This thatch-roofed makeshift house with its walls of straw matting was terribly narrow for all the boarders to sleep in. Of course, he could sleep here as it was not yet cold. Cha Gi Yong had to stay here because Chong only gave work permits to those who boarded here. “This is like crying yourself to sleep” was his thought. A straw rope was stretched across the room so that, when sleeping every boarder could put his uncoiled feet on this rope. The labourers called their boarding houses “match-boxes”, “bean sprouters” or “packing cases”, which, in all respects, were typical of the construction sites; it was a “world where one steals a man’s nose as soon as he closes his eyes”. He could hardly breathe because of the foul smell of cheap tobacco.

co and wine. Loud snores were mingled with groans. In a corner two labourers with broken legs were moaning, their swollen feet suspended in the air.

As soon as a white-iron gong rang, everyone jumped up and ran out. It was the signal to go to work. The hubbub was really fantastic. They seemed to come from all thirteen provinces of Korea. Against the background of the rattling Hamgyong dialect he could hear different dialects—the “good-for-nothings” from Cholla Province, “lepers” from Kyongsang Province and “rakes” from Hwanghae Province. All of them in their working clothes stained with reddish dirt were out in the yard holding shovels, picks, back carriers, two-man shoulder poles and hand-truck brakes, as they stood eating their breakfast. The meal was served in an enamel bowl. A pair of thick chopsticks crossed over the bowl. It was half filled with stinking millet with a splash of bean-paste soup and a lump of bean paste smeared in a corner, which was scooped with a wooden spoon from the six-mal barrel. Some ate their share in a twinkling on receiving the bowl and took a drink of water. This was a third of the benefit they got for a backbreaking day’s work.

“Oh, hell, this is slavery. So this is the morning in my homeland. I must throw them rays of hope and illuminate their road ahead.”

Cha Gi Yong shouted to himself as he took his enamel bowl, casting his moist eyes at the workers going towards their respective work sites. Now it was clear to him why the Comrade Commander had sent him to the Taegok Mine to get in touch with major industrial districts. He could vividly see the whole face of languishing Korea. In the northern border areas people were slaughtered with guns and bayonets and whole villages were burned down, while here at such places men were herded into a death without smoke or explosives. Until the previous year Cha Gi Yong had been a unit in one of these crowds, and had not understood who was dragging him down, tying him hand and foot, and why. Sometimes, when he could not suppress his anger he would destroy trucks or winches, or strike the taskmasters but that didn’t do much good. Unable to live on in a sober frame of mind he would drink until his bones were soaked with alcohol, but this was no use, either. Only the revolution had given him light, invigorated him and made him realize that life was worth living.

With the help of Hong Il Hwan, Cha Gi Yong got a work

permit that day to carry stones with a two-man shoulder pole where a stone wall was being built. That night they again crawled into the sewage pipe and finished what they had left the day before, and at around three o'clock in the morning left their hideout. Hong Il Hwan went to the eastern street where many boarding houses were located while Cha Gi Yong walked towards the construction sites. He was carrying a starch bag on his hip and a bundle of handbills in his tunic sleeves. Right in the middle of every site there was a wooden shed where the labourers were formed into workteams according to their work permits. He approached it stealthily. It was quiet all round. He took a handful of starch from the bag and, smacking it on the bulletin board, pasted handbills on it. Then he crept towards a building site, where steel reinforcement units stood like a forest. Down on all fours, he looked round carefully for a while, but couldn't see a suitable place to paste up handbills. He walked on a few yards and found a board fence with panels leaning up against it. He was approaching the fence, sticking his hand into the bag, when a bespectacled watchman approached from the opposite direction, stick in hand. As he heard the sound of footsteps he looked round and yelled.

"You come to steal the boards again, you damned bastards?" He picked up a stone and threw it at the wormwood bush. Cha Gi Yong had to lie flat in the gutter and remain motionless at the feet of the watchman in his riding breeches, though dirt trickled down over his very neck. Presently the watchman went away grumbling to himself, and Cha Gi Yong started using his starch, standing close to the fence. During the day he had noticed that this was a place crowded with workers, so he stuck quite a few handbills on the fence.

After making the rounds of several construction sites in this way, Cha Gi Yong came out into the street. Fortunately, he managed to get behind the police station. A sentry was standing by the front gate and every few minutes a mobile sentry made a routine inspection. Cha Gi Yong turned off at a corner of the wall and crawled down under the stone bridge. Suddenly, with a clattering noise, an armed policeman came running towards him from where a street lamp shed a dim light. Though it was dark Cha Gi Yong was sure he was running towards the bridge. And he remembered that he had dislodged a stone when he was scrambling down it. His hair stood on end. The policeman was only ten metres away. Cha Gi Yong felt the ground,

picked up a stone and flung it over the wall. It flew overhead in a fine arc, hit the ground with a thud and rolled down the slope. The policeman stopped, and looking round, went straight over the wall.

"That's fine, you stupid bastard!"

Cha Gi Yong swiftly came out from under the bridge and sticking close to the wall, pasted up his handbills. It was a dark night and they could not be seen. He pasted five or six of them up near the street lamp; now he only had a few left and he was out of starch. He wrapped a stone in the handbills and threw it into the front yard of the police station. A dog started barking inside the wall, a whistle blew near the front gate and there was a clatter of feet on the gravel.

"You are too late, chaps. Make as much racket as you want," Cha Gi Yong said to himself.

Escaping from the street, he went down to the shore, bathed and went quietly back to the boarding house. On the way he met Hong Il Hwan carrying the yoke with a glistening water pail hanging on either side. He told Cha Gi Yong that he too had had a couple of nasty moments but had completed his job safely.

Like the day before, Cha Gi Yong pushed his way in among the sleeping labourers and pretended to be asleep. After breakfast he went to the site. Though it was not yet fully light people were crowded round all the places where the handbills had been pasted.

"General Kum Song founded the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army. Why, that's tremendous news."

A dark-faced youth gave a cheery cry and read out the handbill in one breath.

"Fellow countrymen! Your country has been taken from you by the Japanese. You are oppressed and exploited. To overthrow Japanese imperialism which has occupied our country by bayonets...."

Scores of workers crowded round him immediately. First they did not know what had happened but, speaking to each other in undertones, they began to understand the message being read out. Soon their eyes were sparkling and they looked like different men. They seemed to have thrown off the fatigue of their life-long drudgery and to feel fresh and invigorated. With his old felt hat pulled down over his eyes, Cha Gi Yong elbowed his way through the crowd and was surprised to see what a tremendous reaction had been aroused by one tiny sheet

of paper. Rubbing his rough chin, he let himself be jostled by the crowd. His heart was pounding wildly and his eyes were ready to flood with tears. How anxiously they had been waiting for this news! "General Kum Song founded the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army"—this brief news lit a flame of hope and courage in the hearts and minds of workers who were maltreated and starved. The name "General Kum Song" was spoken over and over again.

"The supervisor is coming!"

"Take it away."

"Don't touch it."

"What's that? Let's have a look," said Cha Gi Yong, pushing aside the man who stood in front of him with the two-man shoulder pole.

A man forced himself through the crowd of workers. He was not the supervisor; he was the detective who frequented this place and sometimes arrested a man or two to give them a good beating at the police station. It seemed that he had come across this sort of thing in other places, for he rushed towards the handbill, his uplifted hands shaking convulsively. He cut such a comic figure that there were bursts of derisive laughter.

"Be off!" The detective howled madly, baring a protruding tooth, like a beast caught in a trap. The more he shouted, the louder the workers laughed.

The work places and side streets were agog with people. They were not too voluble but their spirits were high. Liveliest of all was the market place on the eve of the Autumn Festival. At every corner people got together and talked about the handbills. At the noodle house and in the draper's shop, at the rubber shoe stalls people stopped working to discuss it heatedly.

No work was done that morning. There was dead silence on the sites where they were building the fertilizer factory and the wharf. People flocked into the streets. All faces were beaming with delight. Armed police ran up and down the alleys and the mounted military police hovered round, goggling. A wrestling match was in full swing in front of the boarding house. Young men, stripped to their waists, were struggling amid loud yells. Through the open door workers could be seen drinking wine in the room, dipping rice bowls into a wine jar.

"When should we drink if not today?"

"It's the best news I've heard in the ten years since I left home, men."

"I think I'm going to run away to the Tuman-gang River."

"Hey, the wine is brimming over."

A middle-aged man with bushy whiskers approached the wine bowl, lowering his head and sticking out his lips. A cosy and warm spring-like atmosphere had been created in the boarding-house room which had been full of stale stuffiness and dampness.

Towards dusk Cha Gi Yong left for the Taegok Mine. He had done his job of conveying instructions from the organization and collecting information here. And he had given Comrade Hong a helping hand with the handbills. On his way to the railway station, Cha Gi Yong went up the slope he had passed the other day. There was not a soul in sight in the street where that pro-Jap had made his tedious speech, wielding his brush, on the rough track where the hand truck had flown up in the air, or on the seashore where the workers had been swarming, sifting gravel.

There were wild cries. Somebody must have suffered a belly-grab or been tripped up in the front yard of the boarding house. From the opposite direction a young man was walking up the slope on crutches. He was a man from Pyongan Province, one of the two workers who had been moaning at the boarding house because of their broken legs.

"Where are you going?"

"Back to my home town," replied Cha Gi Yong, grinning.

"Don't go home. Go up into Hamgyong Province. They say the people are queuing up on the Tuman-gang River to be picked up by the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army."

"If it's true, it's worth going."

"It's true. I'm not a liar. You know why the cops were blowing whistles and making a big noise in the street last night? A guerrilla appeared at the market place and made a speech. That's what they say. Everybody in the town knows it."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

Cha Gi Yong broke out a merry laugh, showing his broken front tooth.

"Why, you really are happy."

Lighting a cigarette and holding his crutches, the labourer from Pyongan Province laughed pleasantly, looking up at the sky.

On board the north-bound train, Cha Gi Yong gazed out of the window at the East Sea, at the villages and fields flying

past. Korea's look, Korea's expression, seemed to have changed overnight. The sullen, frozen faces of the maltreated and agonized people, which had resembled a bleak morning, were now beaming with vigour and delight. The proud consciousness that they had a leader, the ardent hope that national liberation was not too far away had painted a streak of bright light that ran through everyone's veins.

In this way the exciting news about General Kum Song and the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army had regenerated hearts that had been parched in the torment of national ruin. Like water flowing into the desert, like a torch in the darkness of night, like the sight of land to a wrecked ship tossed in a storm, the news spread from mouth to mouth, lifting every heart.

The train blew its whistle as it ran along the shore, and Cha Gi Yong smiling to himself inhaled a deep puff of smoke, sending a cloud through the open window.

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"What? They say a guerrilla has appeared in Hamhung? Splendid! A guerrilla it is. He is Comrade Cha Gi Yong."

Comrade Kum Song laughed out loud, pausing and turning round. Han Hung Su and Chon Gwang Sik had been following a step behind. Stepping forward to his side, Chon Gwang Sik went on reading out the report that had come in from North and South Hamgyong Provinces. A reconnaissance team sent out from Ssoksae Valley had returned, bringing news from the upper reaches of the Tuman-gang River and some parts of North Hamgyong Province. It was reported that troops of the Ranam Division had been deployed close together along the river and that on the other side of the Oranke Ridge the whole area was thick with "punitive forces". Meanwhile, a rumour had spread far and wide that the guerrillas had appeared in Hamhung, Hoeryong and Musan.

"I'm sure Comrade Cha Gi Yong will push ahead with his work."

"He has widened the scope of his activity considerably, I should say."

As Chon Gwang Sik commented, his face raised a little,

leaves fluttered down on his head. When they were here last spring, the buds on the zelkova tree had just burst into leaf and magpies were nesting at the top, but now its leaves had changed to autumn tints and dropped even when there was no wind.

"I thought Comrade Pak Hung Dok would get things going quicker in his area. I wonder what he is doing," said Comrade Kum Song, holding his hand up to the starry sky to reach out at the leaves.

"As a rule, he is slow-moving but at critical moments he's always on the ball. I think he may well be doing things in a big way by now," said Han Hung Su in a low voice. He sounded a bit excited, not like his usual rather respectful self.

Darkness had fallen and it was very quiet all round. Thousands of stars twinkled in the sky appearing to hang, like exquisite fruit, on every branch of the zelkova tree. For days Comrade Kum Song had had no opportunity to have a night stroll with these two comrades. Right after the battle at Ssoksae Valley he had called a meeting of his commanders and underground workers. Then, for nearly ten days he had kept to his room, receiving reports and holding meetings. Today he had got up early in the morning and gone out to a nearby village where until evening he had had talks with people in different sections. At this moment he was full of deep emotion. Because he had come back to this village of Liangkiang where the year's journey had begun; and he was going to analyse the work done so far and to discuss the coming winter. He must have shared the feelings of a peasant who, having ploughed and cast his seeds on barren land, was looking at the waves of golden corn, sickle in hand. The long march through the Amnok-gang River area to sow the seeds of revolution had borne fruit more quickly than he had expected. It was as clear as day that the semi-guerrilla zones which had just been established would grow and that our activity in enemy-held areas could easily be stepped up.

"Won't you go in?" said Chon Gwang Sik, anxious about the Comrade Commander's health, because he had been working through many a night.

"Let's walk a little farther. This autumn night is too beautiful to look at alone, to indulge in reveries alone. Let's walk together." He left the zelkova tree and went across the wooden bridge to a sloping road densely lined with mulberry trees.

After walking for some way, he paused by a knoll covered with wild chrysanthemums.

"How should we spend the winter? What do you say?" Comrade Kum Song asked abruptly, pushing up the peak of his cap. With arms akimbo, he gave his own opinion on a number of problems to be considered at the meeting: The revolutionary situation is changing radically now. Things are different from when the guerrilla army was first founded. Today our bases have been set up over wide areas, military actions have been started and our revolutionary influence spreads all over the country like the surge of waves. At first the enemy was completely confused. Now he is gradually calming down. After a summer of confusion, the enemy has realized how bad his situation is. So he is taking determined action to wipe out the guerrilla army and its bases once and for all. And how do matters stand with us now? The new companies formed in different zones are not yet ready to defend these bases which have barely been secured but are not solid enough to be equal to their missions. After his first attack fizzled out at Ssoksae Valley, the enemy began making preparations to stifle the revolution in one go within a reasonable time. Ready in their winter quarters, the Kwantung Army and the "Chientao Expeditionary Force" are waiting for orders to take action. It is obvious they are aiming to finish off Korea's revolutionary forces completely this winter or, at least, to hit them so hard that they will not be able to do much for the next ten or twenty years.

"What do you think? In these circumstances what should we do and how? What can we do not only to maintain the guerrilla army and our bases but to strengthen them too, to deal the enemy a shattering blow? I would like to hear your views. That is what the forthcoming meeting is about. The situation is strained for other reasons, too. It is not just the expected enemy attack. As you know, there is a sharp class struggle in the revolutionary bases as well as in the enemy-controlled areas. Our country has virtually become a cauldron of national liberation and class war.

"The area where Comrade Li Chol Gun is working is typical. The class enemies are setting fire to the grain fields, informing against our underground political workers and engaging in espionage. On top of this, some of our comrades have been unable to help the Anti-Japanese National Salvation Army with its definite limitations overcome its weaknesses. So they

are not in good terms with it, are in opposition to those who are supposed to be affiliated with the anti-imperialist united front. To make the matter worse, the enemy has taken steps to capitalize on this. Nor can we say that we have settled things completely with the nationalists. This is how matters stand. Comrade Han, and Comrade Chon...."

Comrade Kum Song broke off, and putting his hands on the shoulders of his two comrades to push them gently forward, walked on into the thicket. He raised his head and gazed up at the bright Milky Way. There was a sharp glint in his eyes, showing clearly a high degree of tension, as was often the case. He strolled on a little farther and picked a chrysanthemum. As if he had put all his worries behind him, he gave it a close look and raised it to his nose.

"To my mind it would be a good idea to expand the company in each district quickly and let them take military action to disperse the enemy forces." Creasing his forehead, Han Hung Su went on: "And I think it would be better to further expand the semi-guerrilla zones, without increasing the liberated areas right now."

"I agree," said Chon Gwang Sik. "But I have one thing to add. Drawing on our experience in Ssoksae Valley, how about fighting a few effective battles?" As he said this he appeared a little unsure of himself, for he tilted his face to one side with a serious expression.

"Have you anything else to add?" Comrade Kum Song again stopped over a patch of undergrowth and picked a blade of grass, before looking at the two men. As they had nothing to add, he spoke slowly.

"It seems to me that this autumn is dragging out far beyond the normal deadline in the calendar. It is a really good autumn. Let's wind up the meeting quickly and send the comrades back to the liberated areas so that they can speed up the harvest. Let them obtain every grain of food they can. And we'll have them pick plenty of mountain greens. Spring is not the only season for picking greens; let them harvest everything that is edible. Now, look at this. These valerian greens are still fresh. Of course, the snow will fall. The cold weather may come at any moment because we are up in the north...."

Handing the blade of grass to Chon Gwang Sik, he went on.

"Now let me put my views. It seems a good idea to dis-

perse and weaken the enemy and expand the semi-guerrilla zones. And as Comrade Chon Gwang Sik said, conducting a number of effective battles can be one of the methods. However, we must proceed from a correct evaluation of the correlations of forces between friend and foe. We must not allow ourselves to be carried away by recent successes or to overestimate our forces and act rashly. Nor must we be afraid and shrink back before an enemy offensive. Frankly speaking, our forces are not yet ready to meet the enemy face to face. From the strategic point of view, there has been no change since we discussed it last spring at Small Plot. But the enemy has been concentrating his troops on this side and his numerical strength is scores of times greater than in the spring. That leaves us no way out? It does. The enemy has shown us one great defect. The Kwantung Army, the "Chientao Expeditionary Force" and the like are only capable of regular warfare. Guerrilla warfare they are utterly unprepared for. The more the enemy increases his numerical strength, the greater his difficulties—his manoeuvrability, his operation and his supply line.

"This shows that to choose guerrilla warfare from the start was the right tactic.

"The enemy has one other defect, and a fatal one. Their grasp of the situation is poor, and their understanding of their opponents. If we use this to good account, we can keep him helpless. Until the battle at Ssoksae Valley the enemy had been unable to find his opponent, though he rushed troops into the Tuman-gang River area. He intended to wipe out the guerrilla army but the guerrillas were nowhere to be found. Then he began to threaten and attack the civilian population.

"And at that moment we gave him battle at Ssoksae Valley.

"He was delighted to see the guerrillas appear on the scene despite his great setback, for he actually saw his opponent in the open. Now he believes that this appearance itself is a guarantee of victory for him. For he fully believes in his superiority. What is important here is the fact that the enemy does not understand the significance of the revolutionary bases in the anti-Japanese armed struggle. He is convinced that once he wipes out the guerrillas, the bases will fall apart. So what should we do? We must defeat the enemy with tactical superiority. And what is our tactical strength? It's very simple. In a nutshell, we'll move through the mountains all winter and make the enemy follow us, that's all. Meanwhile, the bases must look

after their own affairs. Our companies should be enlarged into battalions, and the bases consolidated into impregnable fortresses, into strongholds."

Comrade Kum Song paused briefly to enable the others to think it over before he continued.

"Let's hold a meeting tomorrow. The comrades may have better ideas."

Then he revealed his plan to lead the main force on a march through the winter—this time along a different route from that taken in the summer—up north across the Laoyehling Range. During the first half of the year the unit had gone south, but this winter it would march north. In the summer we marched alone, covering our traces from the enemy, but this winter we must make the enemy follow us. In the summer we visited towns and villages. In the winter we must keep moving through the mountains; we must lure the enemy into the coldest and toughest places.

Presently they crossed a smooth rise and found themselves on a patch of grassland where they could get a view of the river. On the way back, he said that for the last few days he had been thinking about a winter march and this had reminded him of an amusing story.

"It is a story of how a butterfly killed a cock. One warm spring day a butterfly was perched on a flower. A cockerel saw it and ran to catch it in his beak. The butterfly flew away swiftly and landed on another flower a few paces away. Again the cockerel ran there to catch it. But the minute his beak had almost reached the butterfly, it flew off to another place. Continued failures angered the cockerel but he went on with the chase. The butterfly was nearly caught every time, but always flew off at the last moment. It stopped and flew and stopped and flew, luring the cockerel to a cliff. The cockerel was quite worn out by the time the butterfly had reached the edge of the cliff. Suddenly it flew just beyond his reach. With a final effort, the cockerel took one big leap and went straight over the cliff and died. That's the story...."

Both Chon Gwang Sik and Han Hung Su held their sides laughing. Han Hung Su who was seldom relaxed in the presence of the Comrade Commander rolled about laughing till the tears were streaming from his eyes. Seeing the two commanding officers laughing, Comrade Kum Song too broke into laughter,

spreading out his arms. The tranquil autumn night—it had grown late meantime—shook as their sudden laughter rang across the far side of the village.

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The day after a meeting was held, attended by the commanders and underground political workers. Yang Gi Hak, Chin Il Man, Song Dok Hyong, Kwon Man Song, Choe Gi Gap and nearly all the political workers from the Tuman-gang River area took part.

At the meeting Comrade Kum Song analysed the current situation, proposed a policy of winter operations for strengthening the guerrilla army and the revolutionary bases, and also suggested ways of improving our relations with the Chinese nationalist anti-Japanese units. The meeting approved the policies Comrade Kum Song proposed unanimously.

As for the winter march, he spoke in the same vein as he had done to Han Hung Su and Chon Gwang Sik. However, the question of improving our relations with the National Salvation Army units was discussed in great detail at the meeting. This was an urgent matter for all the guerrilla units and bases, particularly for this district of Liangkang where Song Dok Hyong had started working. According to Song's report at the meeting, the "Self-Defence Army", one of the Chinese nationalist anti-Japanese units, stationed not far from Liangkang, was gradually becoming hostile towards the guerrillas, and had, in collusion with anti-communist elements in the Independence Army, hatched a plot to disarm the guerrilla company there. Our side had begun by patiently discouraging them from the plot, in an attempt to avoid a conflict. However, the "Self-Defence Army" had regarded this as a sign of weakness and, one night, attempted to raid the guerrilla company. Song Dok Hyong's company had no choice but to contain them in advance and had clashed with them a few days ago, near Erhtaokiang. As a result, Song Dok Hyong's unit had disarmed a reactionary unit of the Independence Army from Fusung. Having witnessed this, the "Self-Defence Army" had moved to an unknown place in the north. Following Song Dok Hyong's report,

there was another on minor frictions between the guerrillas and the National Salvation Army in Wangching and Holung.

Comrade Kum Song stressed that attention must be paid to this development. He had long ago emphasized that to achieve joint action against Japan with the Anti-Japanese National Salvation Army, the anti-Japanese forces of the Chinese people, was an international form of anti-imperialist united front, and strategically was of paramount importance. Last April, simultaneously with the establishment of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army, he had raised this problem which he had solved personally. While preparations were afoot in Antu to found the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army our revolutionary forces had not been on good terms with the Anti-Japanese National Salvation Army and this had been one of the biggest obstacles. This was due to the malicious Japanese imperialist endeavours to divide Koreans and Chinese, to the ultra-left actions of the sectarians, and also to the anti-communist attitude of some leaders of the National Salvation Army. The Chinese Anti-Japanese National Salvation Army had captured and slaughtered many young Koreans in cold blood, Koreans who came from different parts of the country to join the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army. Moreover, anti-Communists in the National Salvation Army had engaged in some dirty propaganda claiming that the Korean Communists were working hand in glove with the Japanese to occupy China and carve up Manchuria with them.

At that time Comrade Kum Song, braving all dangers, had gone in person to Antu to dissuade Commander Wi's unit from committing hostile acts; he saw to it that many Korean youths detained for execution were released and that relationships between the guerrilla army and the Anti-Japanese National Salvation Army were greatly improved.

At the meeting Comrade Kum Song again underlined the importance of an anti-imperialist united front and proposed a policy to improve the guerrillas' relations with the National Salvation Army as soon as possible. He spoke in the following vein: Unless the problem of the united front is properly solved, the guerrilla army will find itself encircled by enemies. And if the reactionary units of the Independence Army take a hostile attitude towards the guerrillas and even the National Salvation Army units oppose us at a time when we are fighting hard against the Japanese imperialists, what will become of us? While carrying out their "punitive operations", the Japanese

imperialists are estranging the two nations and encouraging an anachronistic aspect—the anti-communist sentiments—among the bourgeois nationalists so as to use the Independence Army and the National Salvation Army against the guerrillas. If we do not understand this and are concerned with minor skirmishes and shun them, then in the long run we will be playing into the enemy's hands. We must take the initiative in solving the problem, for in this way too we hit out at Japanese imperialism. Some National Salvation Army units have lost faith in victory and because of supply problems are encroaching on people's property. Some other units even show an inclination to surrender to the Japanese imperialists. We must discourage them from this. If, instead, we hit at them, the consequences will be serious. We Communists must not try to fight alone whatever happens. We must make sure that, despite different political affiliation and status, all forces opposing the Japs unite as one and fight together. Some may be irresolute, indecisive, and may vacillate or drop out. But we must be patient and use our influence to prevent this.

Comrade Kum Song also suggested practical ways and means to solve this problem, in relation to the forthcoming winter march. What was important here, he pointed out, was to take the initiative in getting in touch with them to exert a powerful influence on them and, where necessary, the guerrillas should go and meet National Salvation Army units or send more political workers to work among them.

The meeting was over and the political workers immediately went back to their respective assignments.

The following morning Han Hung Su called on the Comrade Commander.

"I think you must leave for Hsiaoshaho today," said Han Hung Su, trying to make the journey home into an unavoidable duty.

Comrade Kum Song noticed this, and in order to divert Han's attention, asked him what the paper package was, which he had brought in.

"Nothing special. Some medicinal herbs to cure stomach troubles."

"Where did you get them?" inquired Comrade Kum Song, and unwrapped the carefully prepared package. As he undid the sheets of paper, he smelled the sweet scent of medicinal herbs.

"These are *sapju* roots, and these are *omija*. But I don't know what this is," said Comrade Kum Song, touching one medicinal herb after another.

"They are *insam*."

"*Insam*? But these were not prepared at a drugstore, were they?"

"I collected them at odd moments."

"Collected these at odd moments?"

Only then did he recall that at every halt on the march Han Hung Su had gone off into the bushes searching for something. Once it had started to rain and he had seen Han Hung Su, who had been drying herbs, hurrying to collect them.

Comrade Kum Song was silent for a while, as he gazed fixedly at the package of herbs. He felt that he could no longer turn down Han Hung Su's suggestion. He realized how hard Han Hung Su had worked to get some of the herbs. Moved by this scrupulous care, Comrade Kum Song brought his hand to his chest and the corners of his lips curved in a smile.

"I'm sorry I've kept worrying you, Comrade Han. Every time I meet Mother, she asks about you. But you haven't met your own mother in Namyang for the last few years."

"Comrade Commander, my situation is different. My mother is healthy. And my father is still alive. This medicine was not obtained by me alone, but by all of our comrades...."

Han Hung Su could not continue, but after hesitating a moment, he went on.

"In order to find out how to compound the herbs, Comrade Cha Gi Yong covered a hundred *ri* at night. Many of our comrades searched all the hills behind Mengchiang to dig up medicinal plants. In the rainy seasons, lest the herbs should get wet, Comrade Pak Hung Dok carried them in his bosom and took them out to dry in the shade at every halt. If you do not accept their devotion...."

"I understand, Comrade Han," he said, his voice shaking as tears gathered in his eyes.

"If you don't go now...."

Han Hung Su did not finish the sentence but the words still implied that the Comrade Commander would have no further opportunity to visit his home. And Comrade Kum Song knew this better than anyone.

Comrade Kum Song set out for Togijom Valley. Like last spring, Han Hung Su accompanied him for a long way. When they reached the top of a rise, he asked Han not to come any farther. Only then did Han Hung Su hand him the package of medicine. He could have ordered the bodyguards to take it directly to Mother, but he had been afraid that then the Comrade Commander would give him a scolding.

After sending back Han Hung Su, Comrade Kum Song walked along the field path alone. His face was sunburned; and his passionate and intelligent eyes seemed to have a brighter sparkle than before. His slender, balanced constitution looked well in his slightly faded khaki uniform. The heavy wooden holster rubbed against his thigh at every step. He went over a hilltop quickly. Beads of sweat broke out on his forehead, so he pushed back the peak of his cap. As the moderately creased cap band went up a little, a lock of glossy black hair fell across his forehead.

Feeling much refreshed, he walked vigorously, looking from time to time at the fields or the blue autumn sky. The rich autumn was at its height presenting a scene quite different from spring. The mountains and fields were luxuriant and the scents of autumn were heavy in the air. Every breeze wafted a sweet smell like that of ripe fruit from the mountains and from the fields. It was a season in which men and animals and even the bees were intoxicated by the smell of the fields. Yet, by straining one's ears, one could imagine the gun-reports of "punitive soldiers" ringing out somewhere in the distance and the crackling of houses, furniture, hills or ripe grain in the fields going up in flames. Something white floated over the valleys. It looked like an unexpected mist, or a smoke cloud rising from a village in flames.

He walked unhurriedly along the path crossing a field.

It was most unusual for him to allow himself even a few days off, because he arranged every minute of every day to

devote his all to the revolutionary cause. However, for the last few days, he had been engrossed in several problems that he had been unable to sort out through lack of time. There were so many problems that needed solving, and at once, for the revolution. The establishment of guerrilla bases and their future development; how to begin preparing both ideologically and organizationally for founding the party; how to defeat the Japanese imperialist scorched-earth tactics completely and how to deal with spies—one problem after another cropped up in his mind.

His favourite relaxation was to take a leisurely stroll through a forest, or around the yard of his quarters or to walk along a country path as now. On these occasions, he could often solve problems that might otherwise take days.

First it suddenly occurred to him that when he had seen her last, his mother said she wanted a pamphlet explaining the four-point policy of the Chialun Meeting. A press had been set up by the guerrilla army, but it was not ready yet to print such pamphlets in quantities. And though he had, at odd moments, jotted down what he intended to explain to her in his notebook, it was not enough to satisfy her. The press must be got going properly, whatever the difficulties. It must be put under direct party control; it must print both propaganda and educational material; it must print textbooks for revolutionary schools and put out quantities of handbills to disorganize the enemy troops ideologically. Of course, the kind of material and the circulation would have to suit different local conditions; they could not be mechanical or uniform. He believed that above all publications must be an agitprop media and organizer and this was where *Struggle*, the guerrilla army paper playing the vanguard role, must be definitely improved, *Struggle* must be in the forefront of all publications to give party members Marxist-Leninist education, to expand and consolidate their ranks organizationally and ideologically. *Fighting Youth*, *Fighting Peasants*, *Young Vanguard*s, *Anti-Imperialist Fighters*—the organs of various mass organizations—and other publications must catch up with *Struggle* for quality.

Every time he thought about the press, he would remember the days when he used to publish *Saenal* (New Day) and *Bolshevik*. He had had to work all night by lamplight to put out *Bolshevik*, writing on stencil paper, and when he had duplicated all the copies for the day and put aside the roller,

he would go out and watch the sun rise. The awe-inspiring sight of the sun rising over Chialun was still fresh in his memory, the red sun would go up over the vast expanse of the willow field, turning everything crimson beneath it.

Conjuring up pleasant memories connected with the press and full of hope for its future, he crossed the plain and walked on round the foot of a mountain. The press also reminded him of his mother as did so many things. When he was publishing *Saenal* at Fusung, Mother used to work very hard to get him paper. And she was happier than anybody when the papers came out. Day or night, rain or snow, she would go out with bundles of newspapers on which the ink was not yet dry.

"Mother, we'll carry them ourselves. You needn't do that."

But his mother would answer: "I'm a member of the revolutionary organization, and I must do my duty. When I think of the youngsters who will be delighted to receive *Saenal* I can't just sit around doing nothing." Then she would wrap up the bundles of newspapers. Many anti-Japanese youths and members of the Women's Association scattered in different places expected Mother with *Saenal*. And now this mother, who had distributed newspapers without respite, was lying on her sickbed; and how sad she must be feeling!

As his thoughts about the press receded, the "Minsaengdan" problem came to the fore. He had been told that last February the "Minsaengdan" signboard had gone up in Ryongdure Street. Under the patronage of the Japanese imperialists a certain Pak and several other traitors had taken over a former sweet shop, had put a couple of desks in the oblong room, and written down the name of their organization on a pine board daubed with chalk. Their reactionary nature had soon become obvious from the clamorous coverage and praise the Japanese-paid press had to offer, rather than from their own political activities. Then, last July they had suddenly vanished. On which date, why and by whom the organization had been dissolved, it was not known. But, strange enough, a month later there were more rumours about the "Minsaengdan". It was quite possible that these reformists who had advocated "national autonomy" had finally joined the secret agents. For there had been rumours that the leaders of "Minsaengdan" were often seen coming and going from a two storey brick building on the corner of Ryongdure Street. It had a spacious compound sur-

rounded by a stone wall and the top of its portico was ornamented with the Imperial sign of the chrysanthemum. Setting up an organization of secret agents and having it put down roots deep among the revolutionary masses was characteristic of the Japanese police administration. Therefore, the disappearance of "Minsaengdan" seemed a bit more dangerous. However, making a fuss about it would only play into the hands of the enemy.

Then he thought over the problems that might arise at the bases. The Japanese imperialists had not yet fully realized the danger they might face with the establishment of guerrilla zones. By next spring at latest they would find a huge crack in their colonial rule and then much fiercer and more desperate battles would develop. It would be impossible to hoodwink or cheat the enemy until then. There would be offensives and counteroffensives and the situation would get much tougher. This would make it impossible for the guerrillas to defend the bases alone; only when all the people were mobilized, would we be able to protect the groundwork of the revolution. So all the people must be armed. Everyone who could pull a trigger must be made to defend his base. And it was not just fire power but his ideological readiness that would work miracles. It was clear that the bases would be in enemy encirclement for a long time to come, like islands in a sea. This being the case, where and how should we get food, clothes and other necessities? This problem could not be solved by opening a secure supply route or hiding stuff. Only revolutionary self-reliance would help over the difficulty; only with this spirit could we live and fight on. Relying on our own strength, we would have to run large and small factories wherever we could, produce farm implements, and make and repair weapons. Everybody must be armed, even if it be with primitive arms such as swords or spears.

A narrow stream appeared. Walking on the stepping stones, he crossed the water which sparkled at the bottom. Again he was suddenly gripped by thoughts of Mother. Exactly how ill was she? He felt a pressure on his chest. Was there any way to get back her health? His family were getting poorer and poorer while her mental burdens were increasing as the days went by. She would never stop her revolutionary work because of illness. Overcoming any and every hardship Mother would stand firm and, using every hour and every minute, be engrossed in her revolutionary activity. By the time he crossed

the stream, approached the edge of the field and turned off towards the yard, she would have the door open and be saying, "So you have come?" or she would let Yong Ju know of the brother's homecoming and get out of the room. He could see his mother's smiling face enlarging in his mind's eye, and her movements, holding his elbow with a hand that had grown rougher than before and gazing closely into his face, saying, "You've come." Maybe she would be at the stream today.

Looking straight ahead, he walked on with brisk steps. At times he looked delighted and at times he had a grave, determined look—he was deep in memories of the past or unboundedly proud and confident of the future. Though rather worried about his home, he walked fast, happy at any rate that he would soon see his mother. The plantains with their ripe seeds were trampled underfoot softly and the cosmoses stuck to his sleeves swung briskly. On the hillside the wild chrysanthemums with thick soft, shiny leaves embroidered white patterns on the green grass.

The sun hung over the mountaintop, bathing the whole scene in a beautiful shade of pink, when he reached the entrance to Togijom Valley. He crossed the stream, paused on the familiar field path and looked up. He pushed back his cap, mopped his sweaty brow with his handkerchief and looked at the village road for a long time. His cozy-looking well-loved home lay right before his eyes. A few white pieces of washing hung in the yard, dazzling in the setting sun and the door out of which Mother always came out was half-open. It looked like Yong Ju in the doorway, but as soon as he looked in his direction he rushed back into the kitchen. At this moment Comrade Kum Song had an ominous premonition. If it was Yong Ju why didn't he recognize his brother? Usually, as soon as he spotted his big brother, he ran straight out to meet him, yelling, and would throw himself into his arms. He tried hard to push aside the presentiments that flashed across his mind. Maybe Yong Ju had not recognized him? He might have been looking at the lovely sunset. Or maybe it was not Yong Ju, it might be some other boy. He started to walk again, a smile playing round his lips, suppressing his worries. Always, when his house where Mother lived came into view, he would find himself feeling like a small child again. He approached the yard resplendent with lovely wild chrysanthemums planted by God knows whom.

There was silence all round. He was sure that some one

was in the room but there was no movement. If Mother were home, she would have opened the door by now, and if Yong Ju were there, he would have rushed out to meet him. So obviously Mother was not at home. Probably she felt better and had gone to the village. Numerous questions leapt into his mind all at once. Expectation and anxiety were intermingled. For a few moments there was a thread of reasoning, which left him breathless and strained. His heart beat violently and then seemed to stop dead and he went hot and cold all over.

Finally, Comrade Kum Song pulled the iron ring on the door and called: "Yong Ju!" The moment the door grated he noted a mournful silence. Holding the door, he looked into the room. Yong Ju was crouching in a dark corner, his face covered with both hands. He looked round the room but could not see a single garment of Mother's. His hand, holding the door, trembled beyond control.

"Yong Ju!"

No answer. He felt choked because his younger brother's silence had given him the terrible, heart-rending answer. He ran into the room and took his brother's hand, trying to turn him round.

"Yong Ju!" His voice shook violently. "Where is Mother?"

Only then did his brother turn round and throw himself into his arms. His younger brother was convulsed with sobs and tears streamed down his cheeks.

"Where is Mother?"

But Yong Ju's only answer was to go on weeping, rubbing his face against his brother's chest.

There was another silence, that struck his heart. For an instant everything went black and his heart felt empty and hollow. He pulled his brother to him by his shoulders and shut his eyes. He knew now that the worst had happened but he was unwilling, unable to accept it. It was too dreadful to imagine.

A woman's voice was heard from outside.

"You must be firm and endure...."

She could not finish what she was going to say; as squatting down by the door, she too began to weep. It was Aunt Bong Ae from Hsinglung. Presently wiping her tears, she called again.

"Stop crying, Yong Ju. How sad your brother will be if you don't...."

Her words now made this terrible, heart-rending event

a certainty. Recovering his breath he took a step backwards and had it not for the wall, he would have fallen.

"Oh, Mother!"

The heartstring that had been stretched to the utmost had suddenly snapped. He was gripped by utter desolation, he had been thrown into a black abyss. Clutching the wall with trembling hands, he managed to stay upright. Aunt Bong Ae who had advised him to endure the tragedy, now sat on the porch and wailed, her shoulders heaving. First she wiped the corners of her eyes with the string on her jacket, then with her sleeve. Now she took off her hood and she wept into it. She had been with Mother Kang Ban Sok when she died here in this room a month or so ago. How could she talk about it? She who herself could still not accept that Mother was really dead, who even while she was sobbing, expected to hear Mother's voice at any moment in the room and to see her coming out. She just couldn't talk about it.

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It had happened a month and half ago, in late July.

Mother had been lying down quietly. She said that for the last three days she had been breathing easier and feeling better. Aunt Bong Ae heated water in a washbowl and bathed her hands and face with a damp towel, and combed her hair for the first time in many days. Mother seemed to be feeling much better, and Aunt Bong Ae gave a sigh of relief. For the last few days the weather had been nasty, but that morning it was fine and there was a gentle breeze. At lunch time, Aunt Bong Ae brought her a bowlful of thin porridge and she had eaten almost half of it. It was the first time she had eaten three whole portions in one. Aunt Bong Ae was thinking that in a few days Mother would perhaps be strong enough to sit up in bed again, and that before winter she would be able to walk. But she would have to stay to look after Mother for a few more months, though meantime, Aunt Bong Ae reckoned, she would have to visit her home a few times.

Mother Kang Ban Sok had always been very fond of Aunt Bong Ae who would come every month or two to ask after

Mother's health and help her with any household chores she had not managed to do; she had done the washing and boiled the medicinal herbs. She had come here about two weeks ago, to find Mother in bed ill. Aunt Bong Ae was very upset, and in a tearful voice full of reproach had said, "Why didn't you send for me when you were so ill...." She had wept not because Mother had failed to call her but because she was so distressed at seeing her confined to bed. As Aunt Bong Ae wept and bit her lips, Mother took her hand and said: "Don't be offended. It was you I was thinking about. How can I keep you here for days, not just a day or two, however close we are. Anyhow I'm sure I'll be better soon." Brushing a few stray hairs behind her ear, Mother had given the same lovely smile as always.

Five days had passed, then ten days, then fortnight. However, her condition had not improved in spite of Aunt Bong Ae's devoted care.

But that day she suddenly felt better. So Yong Ju had been to the village twice; for the last few days he had sat by Mother's side day and night, looking after her.

That afternoon Yong Ju was reading a book and Aunt Bong Ae was ironing.

"Where do you think your eldest brother is now, Yong Ju?" Mother asked, turning her head towards him.

He put his book aside and turned round. "The other day, the district chief of the Anti-Imperialist League told me that he should be home pretty soon," he answered in a very grown-up voice.

Yong Ju's reply appeared to affect her in some way, for she kept silent for a while and then asked him:

"And when did your other brother say he would come?"

"When he left, he told me he was going to Yenching and would come straight back. But I'm not sure, for he did say earlier that he would have to visit Holung, too."

Mother seemed to be on the verge of saying something, but then didn't.

Yong Ju stopped reading and went out into the yard to chop some firewood. He was not strong enough to carry big logs; so he stripped the bark off fallen trees, brought it on his A-frame carrier, and at odd moments chopped it up for firewood. Every other day Aunt Bong Ae gathered firewood but he put hers beside the chimney, so that she would have to use what he had brought.

Mother gazed at the back of her young son through a crack in the door. Standing with his feet wide apart, he raised the axe high above his shoulders and brought it down. He aimed at the chopping block or the wood but sometimes the axe missed and hit the ground. Gazing at her youngest son, she remembered that spring day when he had brought several bundles of firewood into the yard with his eldest brother. She did not know why but she felt a sharp sting in her heart and her nostrils. Lowering her eyes, Mother asked Aunt Bong Ae, "Bo Gum should be here by now, shouldn't she?"

"She'll be here, because you sent a message," said Aunt Bong Ae. But right away she pleaded: "The work of the Women's Association is important, I know, but you must take care of yourself. You always say that the revolution must be carried out constantly, don't you? Then you must get better so that you can work more and for a longer time."

"Don't worry. I'm always like this. Would you send Yong Ju again to ask her to come? I won't talk long; I've just a few words to say."

Soon after she had told Yong Ju to go, there was the sound of footsteps outside. Yong Ju was saying something, then the door opened.

"Here I am, Mother."

Hearing the familiar voice at the door, Mother's eyes brightened immediately. As Bo Gum entered, Mother raised herself on her elbow, took the visitor by the hand and made her sit down.

"I'm sorry to ask you to come again. But we can't help it; we women must also work hard to win back our country. I should have visited you but I couldn't, so I asked you to take the trouble of coming here...."

Bo Gum was a woman of 20 or so with an attractive face. She immediately put her hand on Mother's forehead. "You must be feeling better today, Mother."

"Yes, I am; that's why I sent for you."

Mother always discussed important affairs with Bo Gum, head of the Women's Association branch, and sent her out on urgent missions. And now, too, they discussed the work of their association. Though confined to her sick bed, Mother still had talks with a few cadres of the Women's Association every day. When any of them came to ask after her health, she kept them

for discussions; and sometimes, she would send for them as she did that day. There were continual comings and goings.

No one knew why, but it was obvious that lately she had been hurrying with her work. She wanted to tighten up the Women's Association's work in view of the founding of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army. She had geared all her work to this since the Mingyuehkuo Meeting. But some local branches of the association were still using the old methods, and this was causing her a headache. Now she was stressing that the Women's Association must concentrate on getting the membership armed to fight exactly like the men. And Mother had been working for this without a moment's respite. Women must defend the bases and run domestic affairs in place of their husbands or brothers in the guerrilla army. They had to keep the guerrillas supplied with food, uniforms, and all other necessities, so that they could win the battles. In order to carry out this tremendous task, she kept in close touch, despite her illness, with each of the Women's Association organizations scattered over a wide area along the Tuman-gang River and around Mt. Paekdu-san. The work of the Women's Association had to be shored up this year to strengthen the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army, and this was being done very briskly under her efficient leadership. It was high time to sum up the work done so far and to move on to the next stage.

"Bo Gum, have you ever wondered what we Korean women will look like when our country wins independence and we have a socialist system free from exploitation and oppression?" Mother asked abruptly, when their discussion was finished.

Bo Gum who had been worrying about the amount of work Mother was doing rather than about her own weighty task, sat in silence and waited for her to go on.

"We Korean women will enjoy the greatest respect and deepest affection in the world then. What will our status be when the Jap imperialists have been driven out and the oppression and exploitation by landlords and capitalists have been eliminated?"

"If you think about this, I'm sure your heart will throb with excitement. Once Yong Ju's eldest brother told me: 'The movement for the emancipation of women must not be confined to claiming equal rights with men. They must be freed from kitchen drudgery. We must put an end to sifting lye from ashes for washing clothes, to lighting a fire for every meal we cook

and sitting up at night to sew by lamplight. We intend to carry on the revolution until we get rid of all these things.' This is what he said and I still remember it."

Getting her breath back, Mother looked fixedly at Bo Gum who nodded gravely, and continued.

"Thank you for everything and remember what I told you today. You and I have nothing to hide from each other. So you are leaving tomorrow? You are working hard. Yes, you must go on working like that, one step at a time. Even a thousand *ri* are covered one step at a time, you know."

After Bo Gum had taken her leave, dusk began to gather, and Aunt Bong Ae brought in a brass bowl of foxtail millet porridge.

The next day.

From the early morning on, many visitors came as usual. The Women's Association members, who had to report to Mother on their work or to receive further instructions, withdrew quickly, merely asking after her health, because they were worried about her. Some of the visitors, noticing how ill she was, stayed in the village, got her medicine and sent for a doctor. There was an anxious visitor or two staying in every house in the village, some of them having come from several hundred *ri* away. They were kept informed of Mother's condition morning and evening. In order not to be a burden, they did not call on her every day; one or two would go to see how she was, and sometimes they got news from Aunt Bong Ae or Yong Ju which was then passed on from mouth to mouth.

Soon the other organizations, the Peasants' Association and the Children's Corps came to hear of Mother's grave illness. The revolutionary masses in adjacent areas were all sad. Whenever people talked, their conversation ended with mention of Mother's illness. At the meetings of the revolutionary organizations, at the edge of the field where the harvest was in full swing, at all the various revolutionary communications centres, at night schools, on the way to the well, or in their homes, people talked about her, shed tears or went in search of some good medicine or some highly-recommended doctor.

That morning felt sunny in the village as the news spread that Mother was feeling better. Aunt Bong Ae had said so when she went down to the village to grind beans to make bean curd.

She told her acquaintances that in the last two days Mother had eaten thin porridge twice a day and that it had given her enough strength to sit up in bed, leaning against the wall. The good news spread like lightning. Young people who were working in the fields were overjoyed. They slapped their thighs and exclaimed:

"How wonderful! Surely Mother will recover soon. Well, let's cheer up."

"Mother has such a strong will that no disease can bring her down. Of course, she will get well."

"But what are the doctors doing? Can't they cure her illness? Shame on them! They make me mad."

Meanwhile, around noon, Mother put her bedding into a corner of the room and sat up on the floor, leaning against the wall. She asked Yong Ju to get her the oil-paper wrapping for her combs down from the shelf and spread it on her lap. She loosened her bun and combed her hair. It had become rather thin during her illness, but it was still glossy and reached down to her knees. The sleek tresses drooping over her shoulders and her breast waved as she ran the coarse comb through her hair. After combing it several times, she paused to look out through the window. The sun was shining gently.

"I wonder where he is now," said Mother to herself. These days she was particularly anxious to hear from her son. Though she had not become weak-hearted or fretted because of her illness, she often pictured her son every day in spite of herself. She remembered how deep in thought her son had walked round the house before his departure last spring. She felt her ears straining to catch the still ringing echo of his footsteps. She had opened the door then and admonished her son, saying, "While you are worried about your home, you cannot make revolution...." He had stopped and dropped his head. She could almost see his figure through the door.

Every time she remembered how she had spoken to him, her heart ached. "I should not have put it that way, should I? He knew what to do without my telling him." Strictly speaking, she had been right to criticize him, but when he had suddenly stopped walking, she had felt a sinking of the heart. "Maybe he is thinking about it now. Marching through a forest, making a speech to his men or stopping in a strange village he may be remembering what I said. Still, I should not regret what I told him. The whole nation is plunged in a sea of blood and millions

of compatriots are crying out for help; there must not be a moment's delay in taking action...."

Mother started to pull down the comb. Her son's image which she had seen through the door had vanished and she saw only the latticework on the paper door. Mother carried on combing and thought to herself.

"Having begun your journey, you must complete it, be it a thousand or ten thousand miles. That is what your father wanted. And it is the only way to save our fellow countrymen...."

She put the comb down and took up a pair of scissors from her workbox. Lifting her hair with her hand she took the scissors and began to cut it off. As her hands moved gently forward, the precious hair that she had kept long all her life fell down.

The inner door opened.

"You must take some food."

Aunt Bong Ae brought in a brass bowl on a tray. Mother did not even look at her and continued to snip off her hair.

"My goodness!" Aunt Bong Ae was shocked at what she saw and put the tray down with a slam, crying: "Whatever are you doing?"

Aunt Bong Ae came quickly and tried to take the scissors from her.

"Leave me be."

"Why are you cutting your hair off?"

"My hair is too thick and cumbersome. I'm just thinning it out."

Mother replied unaffectedly, but there was a little awkward smile round her lips.

"This makes me feel much easier, you see."

"I don't know why you're doing it." Aunt Bong Ae was so taken aback by Mother's lack of concern that she could not say anything more to stop her, and sighing, sat down at the bedside.

Mother kept working the scissors. She was not clipping her hair; she was going too far if to be just thinning it out. At the last sound of the scissors, a handful of beautiful hair coiled on the oil-paper.

Aunt Bong Ae could not understand the reason, however hard she tried to guess. "How dare she cut her hair off?"

To a Korean woman her long hair is her pride and the

symbol of chastity. Therefore, parents take a loving care of their daughters' hair from childhood. Every morning the grandmother, mother or father will sit the little girl on his or her lap and comb and plait her hair. As she grows older, she will tie her hair with a ribbon, and for festivals, will wash it with iris water.

Aunt Bong Ae shed tears because she felt deeply sorry to see the sleek hair piled on the oil-paper.

"Don't misunderstand me. Don't be upset because I've done what I wish."

Mother folded the wrap and pushed it close to the pillow. Quite unaffectedly she asked her to bring the table and took the thin porridge. After the meal she was in a cheerful mood and started talking about her life for the first time in many days.

"Sister, where do you think is the best place to live?" Mother asked Aunt Bong Ae and then talked with her for almost two hours. She lay down on the bed with her pillow raised; she did not seem to be suffering from pain as she usually did after meals. Although she tossed and turned from time to time, she talked on light-heartedly.

Mother said she had visited many places but there was no place like Mangyongdae. Everyone is proud of his home village, the village where he was born and bred but, to Mother Kang Ban Sok, Mangyongdae was particularly dear. The thatched house at Mangyongdae where the Sunhwa-gang River and Taedong-gang River meet, with the green thicket of pine trees behind.

More than ten years ago the family left home when Kim Hyong Jik embarked on his revolutionary activity. They took the northbound path through the bushy young pine trees and when they were about to cross the second rise, Kim Hyong Jik took off his hat and bowed reverently towards his parents—Kim Bo Hyon and Li Bo Ik. They bowed in reply and bade him farewell. Then Mother Kang Ban Sok made a deep bow, with her young son on her back.

"You are having a very hard time. I wonder how long it will be before you return," said Li Bo Ik through her tears, holding onto her daughter-in-law's arm. As Kim Hyong Jik and Kang Ban Sok retreated further and further from their home, the bushy young pine trees looked like a patch of green in the field, while the parents still stood, a long way away now,

waving their hands. They turned northwards along the cart track skirting a hill. When would she see this track again, when would she see her parents and beloved mountains and rivers again? For, walking up this road, her family had made up their minds not to return until their homeland was free. This was Kim Hyong Jik's road, and it was also the road taken by Comrade Kum Song. Even now, in the village of Mangyongdae the old parents would be waiting for news of their son and his family. Kim Hyong Jik had taken the road never to return. In her mind's eye she saw vividly the lane winding through the young pine trees. The picture of parents seeing off the family and waving to them became clearer and clearer. The father-in-law's face was heavily wrinkled; the mother-in-law was in white, with a white hood.

"Mother!"

Mother Kang Ban Sok called abruptly, while talking proudly about her home village of Mangyongdae. Aunt Bong Ae turned away her tear-filled eyes.

"Would you bring me a bowl of water?"

Mother made this unnecessary request to control her strong emotion.

Mother clearly knew that death was imminent, but she did not reveal this, and was calmly spending pleasant hours.

Evening came. The setting sun cast its strong rays on the upper eaves. The clothesline stretched across a corner of the yard threw a long shadow as far as the edge of the maize field. Aunt Bong Ae prepared a bowl of apple juice for Mother.

"The apple is very sweet, and I've squeezed the juice out of it."

Mother turned to Bong Ae as she crossed the threshold.

"Thank you. Please put it down and go. I think I will lie down in bed alone for a while."

Aunt Bong Ae put down the bowl and quickly withdrew.

Mother again remembered those days in Mangyongdae. That day the rain had come down in torrents. It was the first spring rain of the year. Towards evening the day before, dark clouds had gathered, and at dawn there was a sudden thunderstorm. The green lightning had flashed, drawing a zigzag line from Mangyong-bong Hill down to Mt. Muhak-san, illuminating heaven and earth. Then thunder crashed overhead and rolled

over the Rangrim Mountains in the north. As though intent on blowing down the white aspen tree, the wind descended on the village and whirled upwards, wrenching the thatched roofs from the peasant houses before it fled. The whirlwind that had gathered at the foot of Mangyong-bong Hill flew past the bleak slums on Potong Plain and with terrible ferocity tore off the corrugated-iron roofs of closely-packed houses in the walled city of Pyongyang, and signboards in the streets. The *Jintan* signboard fell with a crash and rumbled through the street, and *Pak's Face Powder* and *Rhoto Eye Lotion* poster signs fell apart. Underneath the Okryu-byok Cliff scores of sailing boats danced madly as dark-faced boatmen huddled at the stern, covering their heads with reed mats. One of the masts snapped with a loud crash and fell into the turbulent water. The lightning ran wild as if to crush this old capital of Koguryo which had first wept over the tragic "annexation of Korea" to Japan just two years ago.

The rain poured down in torrents. At the small thatched house on the edge of Mangyongdae, the whole family had spent a wakeful night. The rain had poured in sheets from the roof onto the stone edge of the earthen porch. The master of the house, Kim Bo Hyon, had been gripped in deep anxiety, not knowing why, and had begun to plait a straw rope. The water swept down the gutters and the Sunhwa-gang River raged. The soil which had dried up since the thaw had drunk its fill and now the water rushed onwards towards the river.

April 15th—it was still dawn. There was more deafening thunder, and lightning cutting into the black nocturnal sky as though to tear it into shreds, when the cry of a baby was heard in the thatched house. The cry was so shrill that it seemed to pierce roaring thunder. From the room women's hushed voices were heard, uttering gasps of delight. The kitchen door opened and a woman in white came out into the dark storehouse. It was Li Bo Ik, and in a low clear voice she told Kim Bo Hyon who was making a straw rope: "We have grandson."

It was getting light. The rain abated, and a milky mist slowly wafted down the Taedong-gang River. The sun began to rise, and a tiny crack appeared in the heavily overcast sky, from which an almost imperceptible dim shaft of light shone out. Presently the lightning lost its force. Then there was another flash, and at that very moment, as if to catch it, something white that looked like a thin strand shot up through the

crack, which was instantly covered by cloud. The quickening of the new day was slow, indeed. Darkness and light fought a bloody battle on the horizon, over the swaying East Sea. When the sun finally rose, dispelling the darkness, it shed its resplendent rays over everything. Drops of water hanging on the pine needles glistened and a rainbow formed an arc over the Tae-dong-gang River. The vigorous sound of running water rang through the fields.

"The day has dawned!" Kim Bo Hyon's rumbling voice rang through the house....

Mother Kang Ban Sok was gazing up at the ceiling, deep in her reminiscences. She remembered that day when the lightning flashed, the thunder roared and the rain came down in buckets. Then there was a kaleidoscope of proud, significant events in her life.

She saw the ridge path stretching out into the blizzard. It was an untrodden, snow-covered path. Mother readjusted her son's scarf, and said: "They say it's more than a thousand *ri*; do you think you can make it alone? Of course, you said you could. But I'm afraid you may stray off the road."

Already a big boy, Comrade Kum Song smiled, revealing his dimples.

"Don't worry, Mother! If I keep walking I'll reach my destination."

He took off his cap and bowed to Father, who acknowledged the bow and also smiled. Touching the shoulder of his dependable son, he said: "Make sure you send me a telegram when you get there." In a matter of minutes the snow had covered up all traces of his footsteps.

Then she saw the face of her grown-up son in the glittering snowstorm. He was in ecstasies beyond precedent.

"We've formed the Down-with-Imperialism Union. Please congratulate us, Mother. We need this sort of organization to achieve what Father wanted. For to liberate the homeland and build socialism and communism in Korea, we must first destroy imperialism, you know. This is our proclamation; this is our resolve to fight on to the last."

Her whole field of vision was filled by her son's face; spreading his arms wide as though to embrace the whole world, he whirled round and smiled up at the sky.

Then the figure of her son in a worker's tunic floated before her eyes as he was when he came home soon after the

Sungchiang Meeting. It was a wet night, and he was drenched to the skin. He took off his coat on the porch to wring the water out of it. The water splashed on the dirt floor. He would often come home like this and, after drying his clothes, go off on nocturnal journeys.

One night she had accompanied her son to the village boundary. It was dark and there was drizzling rain.

"Mother, before long, we will take up arms. We have prepared long enough to fight."

Her son said this in a resounding voice. Mother waved her hands, watching her son's receding figure....

Suddenly she awoke from her memories and looked round the room, disappointed. She found Yong Ju seated beside her pillow deep anxiety written in his face. She took his hand and held it to her breast, asking in a low voice.

"What will you do when you grow up?"

Yong Ju did not know what she had in mind. Brushing back a stray lock of hair from her forehead, he replied.

"When I grow up, I'll be a guerrilla like my brother and then I'll farm in our home village."

"You mean you'll be a guerrilla and work in the fields?"

"Brother said there is a lot of good land in Mangyongdae. If there were no Japs, he said, the Koreans could use all the land for farming and be well off. But I've never been to Mangyongdae. Last spring when we were gathering firewood, Brother told me that there is a spring Father liked."

"Yes, Mangyongdae is a nice place to live in. I'm sure you'll go there."

"I'm going to take you there, Mother."

"Take me there?..."

She felt something warm surging up in her heart, and could say no more. Yong Ju, seeing her eyes fill with tears, lowered his long lashes, and rubbed under his nose.

"Yes, we'll go there together," she said as calmly as she could. Knowing that she was already on the brink of death, she tried hard not to cloud her young son's expectations. However, her tone of voice betrayed her unusually strong desire and overwhelming affection.

"Yes, we'll go together. So you must follow your eldest brother's example. You understand?"

"Yes, I do."

When she had recovered her breath, Mother went on.

"Go to the back of the village. Maybe Chol Ju has come...."

His eyes brimming with tears, Yong Ju squeezed Mother's wrist, and laid his chubby cheek against her breast. Mother closed her eyes. She could feel her son's hot tears spilling on her breast and held him warmly like a baby.

"Mamma!"

"Yong Ju!"

Rubbing his cheek against her breast, he held his arms round her neck; his whole body was trembling.

"Mamma!"

"My Yong Ju!"

They cried hard but could not speak because their throats contracted.

Mother and son drew apart only to embrace again; the more they called each other, the more attached they felt. Yong Ju stroked Mother's breast, his eyes closed as if asleep, and his rosy lips quivering. He was barely managing to control himself—he might burst out sobbing at any moment. Mother knew, from the touch of his cheek and his gasping breath, what he was thinking at this moment though she must not know.

Both were silent, but their silence was more eloquent than words. Mother was thinking this was the last chance to be with her son. She wanted to lie down quietly and be with her young son this way just for a few more minutes, without frightening him.

Presently Yong Ju left the room, but instead of going to the back of the village, he watched the house, pretending to play in the yard. Aunt Bong Ae, again in the kitchen, brought the medicine bowl to Mother, telling her it was time to take her medicine. She gazed blankly up at Aunt Bong Ae and took her by the arm. This simple-minded woman did not know how men met the end of their days. She just let Mother hold her hand, quite unaware that this noble woman was approaching her end. Mother was in a peaceful mood and said softly.

"Please listen to me. I can't live any longer. I wanted to go on working, and to see our homeland independent, but I don't think I can. If my son comes after my death, please receive him as I would. And while the Jap imperialists are in Korea, until our country is independent, do not let him move my grave. But... I know he will not give up fighting half way.... When Korea becomes independent, please go to Pyongyang and visit Mangyongdae. It is a lovely place...."

Mother stopped for a moment to regain her breath.

"Don't be sad. Our country will certainly win independence. The day will come when the bells of liberation will ring."

She seemed to want to say more, but closed her eyes. Dusk fell.

It was July 31, 1932.

The dark, moonless summer night was advancing. The sad news of Mother's death immediately spread all along the Tuman-gang River. It spread from Women's Association district organizations to the villages and on through the Anti-Imperialist League, the Young Communist League and the Children's Corps. Darkness filled heaven and earth, and the space between; it covered everything and seemed to deprive men of their senses. People went around, their mouths set tightly and they did not speak. All they could do was weep—on the roads, the people stood with bowed heads, and people in their homes sat sadly looking down. It was too painful, too sad to talk about. Everyone wept. Bo Gum who had come back from her Women's Association mission wept on the porch and the young people gathered at the night school shed silent tears. The Children's Corps members, youngsters of Yong Ju's age, came and sat weeping in the yard; people, young and old, shuffled sad and silent towards the log cabin at Hsiaoshaho.

On the third evening a long funeral procession moved up to the hill behind the village.

Korea's Mother, the revolutionary Mother, whose path had been so rough and thorny, who had experienced every ordeal and hardship over forty years, had gone now never to see the national liberation she had yearned and worked for.

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Comrade Kum Song heard all this, sitting under the lamp. He sat up all through the night, and in the morning went up the hill with his two brothers.

Late last night Chol Ju had come home from where he had been working. Comrade Kum Song had last seen him in the spring, just before the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army was founded, and he hardly recognized his brother. He looked rather

tall and his body seemed to have filled out. He had the same agile movements and penetrating eyes, but there was something more serious about him. Almost melancholy in a way. Comrade Kum Song was particularly surprised to notice that his brother had shrewdly disguised himself—he had been trained through his underground work. With his long hair and sweater, he looked quite grown up, and yet no one would be able to tell what his profession or status was.

However, Comrade Kum Song had been too dispirited to talk to his brother though he had not met him for many months. The three brothers did not speak a word until they got to the hilltop. An elm tree stood alone on the golden frost-covered turf with a fresh mound beside it where as yet there was not a blade of grass coming out. It was the very place where he had paused for a few moments last spring when he had carried firewood down.

The young elm tree already bare of leaves looked ugly, and its branches shook with every gust of wind. The silver flowers of frost blew off the branches and whirled about in the air before they alighted gently on the turf around the grave.

Comrade Kum Song took off his cap silently, and kneeling on the turf, lowered his head. He felt drained as if his heart had been torn to pieces and his whole body shattered into space. His hands resting on his knees dropped limply to the ground. Was Mother really gone? Had she lain here days and nights, here on this bleak windswept hill? Always, in the face of so many hardships, she had said that she must see her homeland free. Had she now gone without seeing it?

"Mother!" he cried aloud, and, overwhelmed by grief, he bowed low. Both Chol Ju and Yong Ju who had prostrated themselves on his left wailed mournfully, their hands clutching at the turf.

Mother had travelled through a life, a life of harsh ordeals always putting off happiness and even short moments of respite for the sake of the future. She met one hardship after another. Suffering and trials had accompanied her all her life. It was she who had always shouldered the heavy burden of poverty, yet she had walked ahead step by step with great tenacity. Life had harassed, tormented, worried her, as if to test the willpower of this quiet, pure and generous Mother. Yet never had her footsteps dragged, never did she blame anyone or hesitated, never had she been crestfallen. Taking her three sons and

looking ahead, she had walked on and on, without complaint, without respite towards the top of the rugged mountain.

With bowed head, wrapped in untold grief, Comrade Kum Song's memories flashed past like a kaleidoscope. What struck him first was Mother's burst of fury at the enemy, one autumn noon when he was only five. Japanese policemen came and suddenly arrested Father, and Mother shouted at them in a fury. Hostility radiated from every part of her body and her usually soft and smiling eyes smouldered with rage. Then he was seeing the grave look in her eyes when she handed him the two pistols Father had left. And in his ears still sounded the words she had uttered, smiling as she brought down the vessel with ribs of beef in it. "I loaded the pistols because I must resist the enemy; two or three of them would have attacked me at the most...." Breathing hard, he clearly saw Mother's live figure, and heard her sonorous voice that had remained unchanged.

He was grief-stricken so he shut his eyes when in his mind's eye he saw his mother trekking across the hill against the blizzard, her skirt billowing in the wind. Holding the copies of *Saenal* to her breast, she walked through thickets, mountain villages and across the fields. She walked the road at night to give advice to Women's Association groups. Quietly yet indefatigably her feet had carried her far and wide. She did not hesitate to walk scores of miles to meet a comrade; how many miles had she walked through torrential rain, carrying messages for Father? How many blows had the enemy dealt to her pure, clear and sturdy heart? Often she would tell her son that her hands trembled when she was washing Father's body, bruised all over after his release from prison. How painful and petrified she had felt when Father, on his deathbed, made his earnest and pathetic will! Yet never had she shed a tear in anyone's presence or uttered a single disheartening word.

It was indeed a miracle that a mother's heart had been able to endure so much pain and hardship, to carry such heavy burdens. Like waves beating against the rocks, life had again and again flung hardship and adversity on her and driven her into an abyss, but Mother had never dodged or drawn back, she had faced every trial and tribulation with courage and overcome them all. Life's road had, for her, been hard and thorny, yet she had always smiled and, calm and confident, she had defied misfortune and fury. All through life she had dedicat-

ed herself to feeding the family and bringing up the young ones and to the struggle to free her homeland and to build a socialist society free from exploitation and oppression, to the noble struggle to emancipate the women of the world and guarantee humanity a wonderful future and happiness. Mother had died at the prime of life, at a time when she should still have been able to do a good deal of work, leaving everything to the coming generation.

For a long time Comrade Kum Song remained with his head bowed, unable to move. The past and the future intermingled and came surging up on him. Suddenly before his eyes Mother's face loomed large. She had been so delighted last spring to look down at our guerrillas from the top of a turf-covered hill. She had shed tears of joy, had smiled with satisfaction, as if all the pain she had suffered in her life had been dispelled at once.

Comrade Kum Song raised his head slowly. Mother's face had vanished. Now he could only see the gentle slope of the hill.

The frost on the blades of grass had turned into iridescent pearls of water, glittering brightly in the sun. An unknown bird with a spotted neck looked down from the top of the elm tree and moved its beak. There was a gust of wind across the mountainside, and the leaves fell silently on the turf. Slowly he rose to his feet.

"Get up, Chol Ju, Yong Ju."

He helped his younger brothers up.

"Stop crying now. If you went on crying, Mother would have been annoyed. Cheer up, and let us work and win the independence that meant so much to Mother."

Chol Ju got up and brushed away his tears, but Yong Ju was still lying flat on his face. As Chol Ju tried to raise him up, Yong Ju writhed and, in a choked voice, cried, "Mother!" His cry was so heart-rending that Comrade Kum Song turned away and clutched at his breast.

In a few moments, he again took hold of Yong Ju's hand.

"Yong Ju, stop crying now and get up. If you go on crying, Mother, too, will cry. Come."

Yong Ju stood up, wiping his eyes with his sleeve.

"Come, face this way, let's talk to Mother."

The three brothers stood in a line. With his head slightly bent Comrade Kum Song said in a gentle voice.

"Mother. I'm going now. I won't see you again until I've freed the homeland.

"I'll regain the homeland you loved so much and take you to Mangyongdae. We'll go back to the house where Grandfather and Grandmother are waiting anxiously for us.

"Good-bye, Mother."

But though he had finished speaking, he stood still for a while before stepping back.

"Let's go, Yong Ju."

Yong Ju was digging the earth in front of the grave.

"What are you doing?"

"Wait a minute."

"What's that?"

"The medicine you brought."

The packet that Han Hung Su had given him was in Yong Ju's lap.

When he finished digging, Yong Ju put the packet into the hole with care and covered it with earth. Again, tears fell on the back of Yong Ju's hand which held a lump of earth. This brought Comrade Kum Song's great sorrow back, everything darkened before his eyes and tears trickled down his cheeks. He turned his face away and felt for his youngest brother's hand. The three brothers were silent as they descended the hill. Only the top of the young elm tree beside the grave swayed in the autumn wind.

Comrade Kum Song spent another night at home, preparing for his journey. Yong Ju never left his brother's side.

"What shall I do, Brother?" was the expression in the young eyes which constantly watched the eldest brother.

It could not be helped, he had to go and leave his young brother behind. His aching heart was torn to shreds, when he thought of how Yong Ju must be feeling.

Again he visited Kim Chang Dok at his house. Kim Chang Dok had long been in hiding to avoid the police, and no one was there except his family. When he asked her to look after his brothers, the neighbour's kind, gentle-hearted wife said that he must not worry, that he should go ahead and make revolution to achieve the country's independence soon so that they could live happily together.

Dragging his heavy feet with difficulty, he reached the road leading to Liangkiang. The villagers and Aunt Bong Ae had come to see him off. Chol Ju and Yong Ju accompanied

him a long way. Once Mother, dressed in white, would have been walking among them, but now no longer. He could see the fleeting image of Mother as she seemed to raise her hand at the gate last spring. Then he faced the hill where a solitary elm tree stood and, bringing his heels together, bowed his head.

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When Comrade Kum Song arrived at Liangkang, his unit was waiting for him, ready to set out on the long march, as scheduled.

The day before his departure, while busy with his work, Chol Ju arrived all of a sudden.

"Why did you come?" asked Comrade Kum Song, though in his heart he knew why. He took his brother to a quiet house near headquarters.

"To see what the guerrillas look like."

His brother would not easily tell him why he had come.

"How is your Young Communist League work going?"

"After you left us, I made another round. As you advised, I'm going to celebrate the anniversary of the October Revolution in a big way because we could not celebrate May Day last time. The morale of our youth is very high, but the 'punitive forces' are giving us a hard time and we can't get a wink of sleep. Smoke is rising everywhere, there is the rattle of gunfire wherever we go and the 'punitive forces' are chasing about like dogs. In the villages they raided, the people are rebuilding their houses on the ruins, only to have them burned down again by the raiders. So the villagers go into the mountains in the daytime and come back to their homes at night to sleep, after the 'punitive forces' have gone. Some people are going to build sheds in the mountains to settle down there. By the way, Brother, I met a man from Ryongdure Street at Pokdong Valley. He said that the 'Minsaengdan' has now been replaced by a 'Concordia Association'; it is telling the people that the Japs' constant 'punitive operations' are mounted because the guerrillas have appeared."

"And what did the revolutionary organizations reply?"

"They are somewhat bewildered. So everywhere I go I say

that the Japs swallowed up Korea before the guerrillas appeared and that the guerrilla army will wipe out all the 'punitive forces'. And everyone is glad to hear this."

"Well done. The Young Communist League must do a lot of propaganda on this."

"The guerrilla bases are mushrooming everywhere now. On my way here I dropped in at Ssoksae Valley; it was quite another world. No military and no civil police; it is a real liberated area. You are going to liberate the whole of Korea this way, aren't you?"

"Maybe. You look quite grown up with glasses on."

Both of them avoided mentioning their mother, so they talked trivialities instead.

At last they reached the yard. The room was rather gloomy, so they chose to stay outside, in a sunny spot near the wall. The brothers carried on their conversation, facing each other.

"I would have been in trouble without glasses. On my way back from Holung, a policeman appeared from nowhere and took me to the police station. He asked me rudely, 'Where the hell are you from?' So I challenged him, saying: 'From Holung. What do you want?' He yelled, 'H'm. What have you been doing, you cheeky pup?' and was about to hit me. And I said, 'If you touch me, I'll get you sacked.' He winced and asked, 'Who are you?' So I told him: 'Use your eyes and you will see. Then you won't get fired.' He was confused. Staring at my bespectacled face, he advised me, 'Be careful of the Communists. Hurry home!' I felt so relieved. Before leaving, I annoyed him by asking, 'May I use your telephone?' And he replied, 'It's out of order. Out of order,' and pushed me out."

"Ha, ha, ha!"

As his brother laughed heartily, Chol Ju proudly lifted up his bespectacled face, looking up at the sky. He was now quite eloquent, yet there was still something of the child about him. Comrade Kum Song brooded about him. Yong Ju should be looked after by his neighbour but it was obvious that Chol Ju, now 16, wanted to lead his own life. However, he had been able to engage in YCL activity solely because of Mother's help. The urgent problem now was how to manage the household and take care of his youngest brother. If he couldn't manage, he'd have to get a job as a worker, and interrupt his revolutionary activities that were now gaining momentum.

That evening after supper, they sat facing each other, when Chol Ju opened up his heart.

"Brother, I've come to stay with you from now on."

"With me?"

It was not unexpected, and he could hardly say no out of hand. His younger brother was in earnest, and in his present situation, he could not do otherwise. Comrade Kum Song did not answer and changed the subject.

Next evening. On the eve of his departure, Comrade Kum Song took his brother to a tavern and asked for a bottle of wine. It was served with a flat saucer of frozen bean curd. He poured the wine into two glasses. Chol Ju understood the meaning. So he was seated, with an averted face, his eyes already moist with tears.

The brothers were silent. At every wisp of wind the paper flaps covering the cracks in the window frames moaned dolefully. Chol Ju was thinking about his mother buried in this alien land. If his mother were still alive, this wouldn't have entered his mind. If she could have lived a long time despite her illness, how happy he would have been! But he had no one to turn to now. Kim Chang Dok's family were kind to him but could they be expected to take care of the two brothers indefinitely? Yong Ju was only nine and he must be looked after by the neighbour, but surely his eldest brother could take him. However, he was offering him the wine of parting.

Neither of them could drink. Chol Ju was plunged into an indescribable sorrow. His elder brother must be feeling miserable, that's why he was proposing they drink the bitter wine. Chol Ju turned away and dried his tears with his handkerchief. Comrade Kum Song was not unaware of what his brother was thinking. He had been so embarrassed to bring his brother here. There was no place to talk to him alone. Now they were seated face to face over the wineglasses. After a few moments he spoke at last.

"I can well understand why you want to follow me. However, I think you had better stay."

"Brother! I'm sixteen and there is no reason why I can't serve the guerrilla army. I can endure any hardship."

"I don't mean that. What will Yong Ju do if you leave, too?"

Chol Ju could not find a ready answer. After a long silence he said.

"Brother, I'm sure Yong Ju will understand if I explain, though he is young and it must be hard for him to be alone...."

He could not complete what he intended to say. Comrade Kum Song had thought that reminding him of Yong Ju would persuade him. But, against his expectations, Chol Ju was determined. In fact there were several reasons why he wanted his brother to stay at home. He planned that the main unit of the guerrilla army should bear the brunt of the enemy attack in the Tuman-gang River area this winter, to minimize losses at the bases, protect the people and reinforce the guerrillas. Therefore, how they stood up to the ordeal of the coming winter would affect the whole future of the Korean revolution. This was not exactly the reason why Chol Ju should not join the guerrillas, but it would be a very hard ordeal indeed for a 16-year-old, and it would be just as hard for Comrade Kum Song to see this torture before his very eyes. As for Yong Ju, he could bear his hardships, as Chol Ju said. If he was left behind, the two elder brothers' hearts would certainly bleed, though they could face it. In the final analysis, however, these were private problems, however serious.

"Chol Ju!" called Comrade Kum Song in a heavy voice, that cracked somewhat.

"Frankly speaking, I'm telling you this, not because I don't want to take you with me. I'm sure you can lead a guerrilla's life all right, though it may be hard. And as you said, if you succeed in persuading Yong Ju, he won't cling to your sleeve. But there is one thing. You know, you have revolutionary organizations here, that Mother had worked very hard to form. The Women's Association, Anti-Imperialist League and Peasants' Association were organized by Mother and she led them herself until her last hour. Mother is no longer here, and if you leave, there will be no one to take care of them. Think it over. If we are to achieve our parents' will, we have a lot of work to do. And I think the most important task is that of developing the organizations."

He stopped speaking and watched for his brother's reaction. His cheery, boisterous brother looked grave at this moment, gazing out of the window without a word.

Comrade Kum Song suddenly thought of Yong Ju who had followed him to the outskirts of the village the other day. Perhaps he was too young or had become more mature, but Yong Ju had not insisted on following his elder brother when told to

stay at home. Once he had left the house, however, Yong Ju had accompanied his brother a long way to see him off. He had walked in front, picking grass by the roadside and kicking stones like any other boy. Comrade Kum Song had walked in silence, unable to urge his brother to go back.

Chol Ju knew how his brother felt, and when they had reached the bridge, he had bade him farewell with a bow and remained behind. Standing at the end of the bridge, Chol Ju had called out to Yong Ju, who kept walking ahead with his elder brother.

"Yong Ju, stop, stop. Our brother is in a hurry."

Saying so, he waved his hand.

Whenever Chol Ju called from behind, Yong Ju looked round blankly, only to keep walking in front of his elder brother. Reaching the outskirts of the village, Comrade Kum Song was going to tell him to return because Chol Ju was waiting for him, but it was more than he could do. As though to accompany the eldest brother indefinitely, he walked on and on unaffectedly, sometimes in front, sometimes behind him. The farther Comrade Kum Song went, the more he fretted. After walking for a good while Yong Ju would put his arm round his brother's waist and gaze up at his face or bound ahead of him. The dry grass rustled behind Yong Ju down the rise and disappeared. In the bean field straggling along the sloping road the unharvested husks burst with a crackle.

Watching Yong Ju walking ahead of him, Comrade Kum Song felt helpless, wondering how he could part with the little one. Once they parted now, who knew when they might meet again. The fickle hand of fate might prevent them from ever being united again. But it was time to go. He trekked along the field lane brooding all the while unable to hurry or slow down. Abruptly Yong Ju turned round. He waited for his brother to catch up with him, and looked up at him with his bright eyes. A child's soul is as capricious as the light of a star; he did not understand why his younger brother had stopped suddenly. Comrade Kum Song raised his hand and was about to pat him on the head when Yong Ju made a bow, saying, "Good-bye, Brother."

At this moment Comrade Kum Song was perplexed, feeling a hot lump in the throat. He had been hoping anxiously that his brother might turn back, repeating in his heart, "Go home, go

home." But now it was different. Yong Ju fumbled in his jacket pocket and pulled something out.

"Take this, Brother!" There were two roast potatoes in his little hand. Comrade Kum Song glanced at them and then at his little brother's tear-filled eyes. Yong Ju used to catch and dry fish for his brother's homecoming and fetch firewood with his frail hands every day to lighten his mother's household work. He was such a considerate boy, but Comrade Kum Song had never expected him to produce the potatoes at this sad moment of separation. His heart would not have bled so, to see his younger brother had cried himself to exhaustion, stamping his feet. Yong Ju gazed closely at the brother who could not take the potatoes, his lips quivering. In a flash, Yong Ju put out his thin hand and pushed them into his brother's tunic pocket. As he grabbed his pocket Comrade Kum Song could feel his brother's hand as well as the warmth of the potatoes. Having withdrawn his hand, Yong Ju stood staring at his brother for a moment before turning on his heels and darting away towards the rise and Chol Ju. *Saecho* weeds on the roadside swayed in the wind as Yong Ju in his straw sandals gradually disappeared in the distance.

"Yong Ju!"

Waking from his memory, he started, and felt a lump in his throat and the tears behind his eyes. He raised the wineglass with a jerk and gulped it down. Chol Ju emptied his glass, as though indicating that he had understood what was in his brother's mind. Watching his brother's expression Chol Ju felt sorry that he had come here to torment him, and now spoke in his usual boisterous and straightforward way.

"Well, then, I'll stay at home with Yong Ju. Don't worry about us. And don't get ill. I will look after Mother's grave. But next year you must take me with you. Do you promise?"

"I do."

A gust of wind rattled the corrugated-iron roof, and the paper flaps on the window frames wailed like a baby. Chol Ju produced a packet wrapped in a sheet of paper. He said this had been kept by Mother for the eldest brother.

"Mother?"

He was stunned and opened the packet. It was a plain pair of canvas shoes and there was nothing special about them. It was all she had been able to leave her eldest son. But he could feel the warmth of her breath and body, and brooded for a long

while. He vividly recalled the figure of his mother who, having made him an army uniform, was worried about a cap and a pair of shoes.

Next day his unit left the village of Liangkiang. Chol Ju went to the top of a hill to see his brother off. It was early in the morning. The newly-risen sun gave him a good view of the flowing ranks. Comrade Kum Song kept looking back to wave his hand.

Fortunately or unfortunately, no one can foresee everything that will happen in the future. Therefore, a heartrending tragedy such as the final separation of kith and kin is often quite ordinary. And had the two brothers foreseen that they would never meet again, they would not have parted the way they did.

The rain fell silently. It splattered on the thick bark of leafless maple boughs, on the tops of quivering aspen trees with sparse leaves, and on rocks covered with yellow moss.

The ungrateful rain was too heavy for late autumn. It had been falling the whole day—since last night. The bare thickets and the fields and roads that had turned yellow in the last few days were dripping wet.

So were the men. The troops trudged along the difficult muddy mountain path, splashing mud over the stones, tree stumps and undergrowth.

A long line of troops was passing along a mountainside shrouded in a heavy white mist. The troops of the National Salvation Army in front had already reached the bottom of the valley, then came the unit under Han Hung Su.

There were a few horses in the middle of the column.

Comrade Kum Song was mounted on a tall chestnut with slender neck, and a few steps ahead a small stocky piebald carried the equally stocky Commander Wi who had a fur coat thrown over his shoulders. There were a few more horses in the front and at the rear, and all of them carried orderlies who were constantly on the move up and down the line.

At a meeting in Liangkiang, Comrade Kum Song had attached great importance to the formation of a united front with the Anti-Japanese National Salvation Army. He soon visited Commander Wi's unit stationed nearby to discuss the winter operations, and they had agreed to deal with the outstanding problems during today's march. The initial plan mapped out by the Comrade Commander at Liangkiang was to take joint action to frustrate the "punitive winter operations" in Chientao of the Japanese Kwantung Army and occupation troops in Korea. But, according to the latest information, some units of the National Salvation Army had become greatly demoralized and had been scattering. So he deemed it necessary to deal with this situation first. How the problem of coordination with

the National Salvation Army would develop was still hard to tell, but it was obvious that lately he had been thinking about it seriously.

As soon as the troops crossed a ridge, a damp and chilly north wind moaned bleakly as it rustled through the forest. Chon Gwang Sik came to a halt, and after looking down the mountain, turned round, his face pinched with the cold, and said.

"We usually have snow at this time of the year. I wonder why the weather is so unusual. Maybe there will be big floods in the late autumn?"

Han Hung Su had just reached the mountaintop, and wiping the water off his chin with the back of his hand, he replied.

"Maybe it is an omen for the coming winter."

"A good one, of course?"

"Good, yes, but I'm afraid it might be a hard winter."

Chon Gwang Sik noticed a sullen expression on Han Hung Su's face, which was rather unusual. He had first seen it just before the unit started out from Liangkiang. Though not always gay and highly optimistic, Han Hung Su was sentimental, and his grim air of the last few days seemed strange, indeed. It could not possibly be that the mere thought of a tough winter expedition had reduced him to this state. On the eve of their departure from Liangkiang Han Hung Su had sent two of his men on an unknown mission. When Chon Gwang Sik asked him where and why they were being sent in such a hurry, Han Hung Su looked annoyed and answered gruffly: "I won't tell you because it's none of your business." Until then the two comrades had always discussed every problem, however small, before taking action.

Han Hung Su looked gloomy and restless and he fretted. He even gave the impression that he was stricken by grief. And yet, Chon Gwang Sik could not ask him why. He had thought he might be imagining it, but now it struck him again. Having exchanged a few jokes about the weather and other trivialities, they resumed their march.

The troops had marched two days now out of Liangkiang. Yesterday they had gone northeastward to contact the National Salvation Army and today they were on their scheduled route to the north, through the wood. The winter march they had just begun was expected to be tough going. They were to cross the mountains, enticing out Japanese forces intended for "punitive

operations" against the bases. The route itself would be far longer and harder than their previous march through the Amnok-gang River area and this would be a winter march. From Liang-kiang they always had to cross the Mt. Paekdu-san range and go north, far up towards the Soviet border in the east. They would cover thousands of *ri* to the northeast through Tunhua, Emu, Ningnan or through the northern district of Wangching, but it was hard to judge what changes there would have to be on their scheduled course, as the occasion demanded. This long march would not have been so urgent if it did not follow an arduous and complicated course through the uninhabited mountains in the severe winter.

As they descended the mountain and parted with the National Salvation Army unit, Chon Gwang Sik said sadly.

"In the distant future, when the Korean people look back on the history of national-liberation struggle, they may say that this year was the toughest and the most eventful—the year the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army was founded. What do you say about it?"

Han Hung Su nodded in full agreement with Chon Gwang Sik this time though, by nature, he was not inclined to make forecasts.

As the troops trekked through a forest for some distance along a mountain range running to Tunhua, the rain cleared up and a breeze started to disperse the dark shroud covering the western mountaintops.

Walking at the end of the line, Han Hung Su seemed to be brooding over something and, with the Comrade Commander's approval, he hurriedly ordered a halt to pitch camp. The rain had stopped and the sun was still high in the sky, and what was more, the enemy was not far behind. And yet, the schedule had been changed. Chon Gwang Sik could not understand the reason. According to Han Hung Su, the troops had to camp because they had not been fully prepared for the march and, on top of this, they had had a soaking. He gave no further explanation. Chon Gwang Sik readily agreed, for Han Hung Su never made mistakes in assessing the situation.

It was decided to camp in a larch forest on the fringe of a narrow stream. The guerrillas chopped wood and made sheds of tree branches for shelter while fires were built to dry their wet clothes and knapsacks.

Chon Gwang Sik climbed up a rise to where headquarters

was situated. When he reached the entrance, he pulled back his wooden holster which had slid to the front, entered, saluted smartly and reported that preparations for camping were complete. The Comrade Commander who had been sitting on a log stool gazing at the map invited him to sit down by his side, and then went back to his map.

"Comrade Han Hung Su has reported that the unit is not thoroughly prepared for the march. What is your view, Comrade Chon?"

"I think if we start completing preparations now, we'll be all right." Chon Gwang Sik sounded hesitant.

The Comrade Commander discerned a note of dissatisfaction in his voice and said.

"To my mind, our situation won't be improved much here in a day or two. Our uniforms, footwear—everything is inadequate for the winter. So you'd better discuss it with Comrade Han and send a message ahead to Fuerhho so that we can make ourselves fully prepared for the winter."

"You want to stop at Fuerhho?"

"Let's go there and get ourselves fully prepared with their help. Our sudden message will cause them some bother because they will have to feed and clothe large numbers. I don't think, however, it will be any great headache, for they are prepared for this sort of thing. Besides, we can stop there without changing our fixed route. There is no other place around here which could cope."

"I understand."

Following the Mingyuehkuo Meeting the Comrade Commander had stayed in Fuerhho, conducting his underground activities as part of his endeavour to revolutionize the countryside.

Before withdrawing, Chon Gwang Sik said that he intended to dispatch Chin Bong Nam who had replaced Pak Hung Dok as logistics officer and reported that a discussion would be held during the evening's political study session. Back at his camp shelter, Chon Gwang Sik was digging out a boulder that stuck up by the entrance. He would have left it as it was, but it had got on his nerves. He had started the job with a stick, but it was taking too long, for the boulder was sunk deep in the ground.

When darkness fell on the forest, Han Hung Su came to see him. He passed on the Comrade Commander's instructions and

they talked about how to carry them out. After that he gave an explanation of the schedule for the day. Chon Gwang Sik again had the same impression of Han Hung Su as during the march. He could see clearly that Han Hung Su was trying hard to conceal his anxiety. On leaving the shed he hesitated and turned round with a sad face; he seemed about to tell Chon Gwang Sik something but could not open his mouth. So he had just gone off.

In the evening Chon Gwang Sik went to the campfire and led the guerrillas in their political study. Discussion was to be about the anti-Japanese national united front, one of the four policies proposed at the Chialun Meeting.

Chon Gwang Sik led the men to extend this problem to that of the anti-imperialist united front and discuss realistic subjects which had been raised as matters of pressing urgency. Speaking of the long winter march, he tried to imbue the men with optimism. Winding up, he made joking references to some points raised in the discussion, which livened up the atmosphere. The discussion over, Chon Gwang Sik saw the soldiers getting a performance together, and then went down to see Han Hung Su. His health was not too good which probably affected his mood, Chon Gwang Sik thought to himself.

The sound of footsteps was heard from down the rise. He saw Han Hung Su coming up. Next moment, however, he found Han Hung Su not walking in his usual gait. He was stooping forward, his feet spread and his body staggering. Chon Gwang Sik paused to gaze at him, and was sure it was Han Hung Su. He was followed by one of the messengers whom he had sent out at Liangkiang, whose mission he had refused to reveal. Chon Gwang Sik hurried down the rise and grabbed Han Hung Su by the arm; he looked as if he was about to fall down.

"Who are you?" His trembling voice could barely be heard for the restriction in his throat. His uplifted face had a ghastly twitch as though suffering from acute twinges of pain.

"It's me. Chon Gwang Sik. Don't you feel well?"

Chon Gwang Sik hugged and turned his shoulders to face him. At this moment he could see a sharp glint in Han's eyes.

"Leave me alone, Comrade Chon. And sit down here."

As if drunk Han Hung Su flopped down, taking Chon Gwang Sik by the arm.

"The messengers have just returned from Hsiaoshaho. I sud-

denly suggested pitching camp today in order to wait for them. I'm sorry I didn't tell you about it but when Comrade Kim Chol Ju was at Liangkiang, he aroused my suspicion. So I sent the messengers. Oh!..."

He gasped and barely managed to add: "Comrade Chon, how didn't we...."

"What's the matter? Speak up quick."

As an ominous presentiment gripped him, Chon Gwang Sik prodded his comrade, grasping his shoulders.

"Mother Kang Ban Sok...."

Han Hung Su trembled, opening his arms.

"And what happened to Mother Kang Ban Sok?"

"She died."

"What? Speak clearly."

"Mother Kang Ban Sok is dead."

Han Hung Su lay down on his back. At these last words Chon Gwang Sik's body jerked as if with electric shock, and he collapsed by his side. Everything darkened before his eyes and he saw thousands upon thousands of stars crisscrossing in the dark and felt empty as though the whole earth had been crushed to pieces. His heart shook quite beyond control. He imagined he was falling headlong into a bottomless abyss. The two men wept, embracing each other.

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The sad news spread quickly through the unit.

The grief-stricken guerrillas moved with heavy feet towards the campfire near headquarters. Sitting side by side at one corner Han Hung Su and Chon Gwang Sik stared vacantly at the fierce flames. In the flickering firelight the guerrillas were seen squatted on the grass in deep sorrow. It had all been taken in dead silence. The tops of the larch trees which had swayed even when there was no wind were hushed as though in a dream.

The silent hours flowed on indefinitely. The men, holding their rifles on their laps, their heads bent and the commanders sitting facing them, clasping their knees with their arms, re-

mained motionless, as if turned to stone. Here and there convulsive sobs were heard.

Presently Han Hung Su slowly rose to his feet. Looking round at the crowd of guerrillas in the forest, he took a step forward and spoke in a low voice.

"Comrades, we have had sad news today."

He hung his head for a while. His shoulders heaved before he went on.

"On July 31 last our Mother Kang Ban Sok died. I think we were at Mengchiang at that time. We didn't even dream of it. Our Mother, Mother Kang Ban Sok, died and we did not know it. None of us was by her side in her last moments. Even the Comrade Commander could not be with her. How could we possibly imagine it?"

"Comrades, we did not get this sad news earlier, because though the Comrade Commander knew, he did not tell us. In this way we have been little concerned for Mother. If we had looked after her, she would not have gone so early and we would not have been ignorant of the news until now. If we had given her an infinitesimal part of the affection she showed us, we would not have received such a heart-rending news as we did today.

"Mother, you have left us.

"As you know well, Mother's life, though short, was brilliant. Mother Kang Ban Sok followed a hard, thorny path with Kim Hyong Jik, the outstanding leader of the Korean people's anti-Japanese national-liberation struggle, and she is a great mother who bore and bred Comrade Kum Song, our people's respected and beloved leader. Her short 40 years were arduous. She faced many hardships and trials; hers was a splendid life that fostered the Korean revolution. Mother has led a glorious life; she dedicated her all to the revolution.

"Mother was the first member of the communist organization formed by Comrade Kum Song; she was a prominent woman revolutionary who linked Korea's movement for the emancipation of women with the communist movement and lifted this movement to a higher plane.

"Throughout her life starting from Mangyongdae to Ponghwa-ri, Chunggang, Linchiang, Pataokou, Fusung and then to Antu, Mother worked without a moment's respite for the revolution; her life was a great cradle, a fathomless spring during the period when the Korean independence movement grew into

a communist movement and then developed into an armed struggle. In the period when the independence movement developed into a communist movement, in the period when the anti-Japanese revolutionary struggle became an armed struggle, two whole generations grew in strength and quenched their thirst under Mother's care. And like all of you I am one of them.

"That day when the Down-with-Imperialism Union was inaugurated, we were resting on the moonlit rock where the elm tree stood on the hill at the back of Huatien, and we wrote down our pledge and the first programme of the communist organization with ink made from an ink stick Mother sent. At Kirin, we bought sheets of paper with money she had earned by doing washing at night, and prepared the first handbills calling for the destruction of Japanese imperialism. Encircled by the enemy, we survived thanks to the pistols she had fetched from Wanliho at the risk of her life.

"If we were exhausted from our fight, if we fell ill, we went straight to her and rested under her loving care. Mother cooled our feverish brows and mended our torn clothes. When we were hungry we would sit at the roadside and eat maize cakes she had made, engraving her words in our hearts. 'If you go steadily ahead you will reach your destination. Remember an old saying: One thousand *ri* are covered one step at a time.'

"Comrades!"

Unable to continue Han Hung Su stood clutching his chest with his hand. A warm lump rose in his contracted throat. He could see Mother's smile before his eyes the time she had handed him the bundle of maize cakes, and he felt as if the forest was turning upside down and the campfire scattering. Han Hung Su bowed his head and covered his eyes with his hand. He gave a sniff and then burst into tears.

Yong Suk who had been seated facing the fire with bated breath, raised her face. First she had noticed Han Hung Su rising to his feet, but she could not understand what he was saying or how he was standing. Her eyes which had been glued to the campfire saw Mother Kang Ban Sok waving her off to the guerrilla army. Her whole being revolted at the tragic news.

Her memories were vivid and real.

Mother helped her put on a rucksack and, pushing back a stray lock of hair, said quietly: "Look here, Yong Suk. You know, you are Korea's first woman guerrilla. Always remember

that. If you dawdle or shilly-shally in the forefront, many women behind you will be unable to move ahead, will have to stand back and mark time....

"If this feels heavy on your shoulders, loosen the strap like this. And always lace your shoes tightly, so that you can walk a long way.

"When you face great hardship, think of your parents who were killed by the Japs."

Now Mother's face which she had seen flashing in the flames vanished.

"Mother!"

Yong Suk stood up and looked round, but the vision had gone and there was emptiness before her eyes. Then she remembered Han Hung Su's first sentence—that Mother was dead. Waking from her reminiscences Yong Suk stretched her arms, and her whole body shook violently.

"Mother!"

She jerked her head and shouted, at the same time as she whirled round and rushed into the forest.

"Mother!"

Han Hung Su who had stopped speaking for a while saw Yong Suk run off. He stretched out his hands, but brought them down, and now continued.

"Our once tiny ranks have now snowballed into thousands. But the formation of our armed forces began from the two pistols that Mother gave us. Now we are setting up guerrilla bases over a vast area and this, too, is thanks to her warm and loving care.

"Mother's bosom was our first revolutionary, our eternal base. Now there are many workers, peasants, youths, students, women in our ranks, people from every walk of life. And in the forefront are those who read the first edition of *Saenal* taken to them by Mother herself, those who learned the Korean alphabet at the night schools, and those who learned what the revolution was from Mother who would visit them rain or shine and speak to them quietly late into the night by the light of an oil lamp, in spite of her fatigue after long journeys.

"Indeed, Mother's embrace was like an everlasting spring. Because we had Mother, we did not know fatigue, we never tired. Because of her considerate care, we did not hesitate to overcome all hardships. Mother was always in our hearts, and she

calmly asked us: 'Be brave! Don't sit down halfway, go through right to the very end!' 'March on and on! Behind you are your mothers who are grief-stricken because of the Japanese.' We were encouraged by her.

"Just as at the time when Kim Hyong Jik died, our pain and emptiness will increase with each passing day now that Mother is no longer with us.

"Comrades, many organizations all over the country that began at Hsiaoshaho—Anti-Imperialist League, Youth League, Peasants' Association, Women's Association, Children's Corps—are plunged into deep sorrow because Mother's ever warm pulsating heart has ceased to beat...."

The tears streamed down Han Hung Su's cheeks, gathered under his chin and then dropped to the ground. He had wiped them away several times but now seemed to have forgotten. Heels together, he hung his head and again closed his eyes and threw back his head as he spoke on forcefully through his tears, stressing every word.

Meanwhile, Yong Suk had run into the forest, not knowing where she was going. She hugged the wet trunk of a larch tree and sobbed, her shoulders heaving, finding no relief.

"Mother! How can you be gone? Mother! Why did you go and leave Yong Suk here? Mother!"

She repeated the word again and again, rubbing her forehead against the thick larch trunk. The answering silence of the forest gave her no solace—the only sound was the water dripping from the branches in great tears.

Time moved on. Yong Suk standing by the tree was so exhausted with weeping that she fell to the ground, her arms clasping the trunk.

Mother's image now floated before her eyes more and more clearly, and she saw again what had happened on that New Year's day.

Wearing a worn-out skirt turned up to the knees and a pair of straw sandals, Yong Suk had tottered down to the spring, carrying a water jar under her arm. Day was breaking, but it was still too dark to see any distance. It had been snowing since early last evening and snow veiled heaven and earth. It was a bleak New Year's morn.

Huddled up with the cold, Yong Suk trod cautiously along the slippery road towards the hollow to the spring beyond the stepping stones. She put down the jar, and picked up a stone to break the thick layer of ice on the water. She threw aside the sharp-edged chunks of ice and ladled water into the jar. She felt a searing pain in her finger tips. She blew on her fingers and carried on. She did this again and again, until her finger tips were red as cayenne peppers and so frozen that she could hardly keep ladling. However, she bit her lip and kept on filling the jar. The snow continued to fall into the round hole in the ice which was just big enough for her gourd ladle. The snow flakes, which looked just like apricot flowers whirled round and round, fell into the water and vanished. She put her clenched hands to her mouth, and stared at the scene. Suddenly she jerked up and gave out an imperceptible moan through quivering lips.

The snow flakes fell into the hole and faded helplessly like every single day she had spent last year. She had lived gasping, looking forward, never back, and today, for some reason, she had suddenly become conscious of herself.

Thinking that in this coming year too, every day would mean little or nothing to her, Yong Suk felt a sort of emptiness in her heart and the tears brimmed over. Putting both hands on her breast, she trembled from sadness and cold. Then she picked up the gourd ladle to carry on.

At that moment she heard footsteps, and when they stopped a gentle voice came from the foot of the rise.

"Isn't it Yong Suk there?"

"Yes?"

She straightened up quickly, and raised her head casting charming eyes on Mother. She felt a soft breath fanning her cheek from behind.

"You are up early to fetch water?"

"Ah, Mother."

Covering her lips with the back of her hand Yong Suk made a bow. Mother Kang Ban Sok approached her and took her hands.

"Why, you're very early for the water on New Year's morn. Your hands are like ice."

Mother put the girl's clenched fists to her lips to warm them, placed the jar on her head and went up the rise. Yong Suk had no time to refuse her help; she followed Mother whose shoulders

were white with snow. It was obvious that she had walked throughout the night.

"You've put the rice in the oven, haven't you?"

"Yes, I have."

"Why didn't you fetch the water in the evening?"

"They say that if you drink stale water on January the first, you will get sick during the year; they told me to be at spring for water before anybody else."

"I see."

As the gourd ladle bobbed up and down on the surface, the water splashed over the edge of the jar. Shaking off the drops of water with her hand, Mother walked up to the front gate of landlord Min's house. She handed the jar over to the young girl and asked her to tell her master to come out.

Soon the landlord Min announced his coming with his dry cough.

"Look at this mess! Don't you know you have to sweep the courtyard when it snows, you stupid, lazy hussy?"

Mother Kang Ban Sok waited for him to come out of the gate and told him to give Yong Suk a holiday and send her home.

"Send her home? This is her house."

"To my house, I mean."

"You want to send her on an errand?"

"I have to go somewhere with her."

So that day Yong Suk visited Mother. She washed, had her hair plaited and enjoyed the holiday. Having combed her hair, Mother took a piece of red cloth out of the chest and made a ribbon out of it for her swaying tresses. For the first time since she had reached the years of discretion, she happily played seesaw with girls of her age.

Next day.

"Now, then, let's walk together all day long today."

Mother set out on a trip with Yong Suk. Snow fell heavily; it reached well over their knees. The small snow flakes whirled in the sky.

"Well, how do you feel?"

"I don't know, but I'm happy."

"Happy? Must be. You feel so when you go your own way however toilsome. From now on we walk like this together."

"You must be cold, Mother."

The rosy-cheeked young girl looked worried, brushing snow off the shawl on Mother's shoulders.

"No, I'm not. When I walk like this, I don't feel cold or footsore."

Yong Suk's oval face coloured and a smile hovered on her cherry-red lips. Her rough thick straw-rope sandals pressed down the virgin snow.

By dusk, they had walked nearly 70 *ri*. During the journey, through Mother's talk, Yong Suk came to see and love another world. A sort of iron wall had separated her from this world, but now there was a crack through which she could see outside dimly, though not without fear. Every word Mother said to her warmed her bruised, frozen heart and opened a tiny window through which to see the harsh class struggle. She could not yet perceive the whole of that world but she could see the weather, breathe the clean air of the outside world and through the strong rays of the sun reaching inside she could see her own life in the dark shadows.

Late that night Mother spoke at a meeting of members of the Women's Association. Crouching in front of the fireplace Yong Suk pushed twigs into the fire with a poker, stared at the mottled shadows cast by the dancing flames and listened to Mother's speech from the other room.

"The Japanese robbed us of our country by bayonets. We cannot sleep in comfort nor breathe freely even for a day until we drive them out. We, the Korean people, have decided to take up arms and fight the Japanese. Early last winter our young people had a meeting at Mingyuehkou and resolved to set up an Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army. Now is the time for us oppressed and exploited women to take up arms and join the men in battle...."

Pursing her lips Yong Suk thrust birch chips into the fire. The resin sizzled, the fire crackled and steam rose from the pot. Red and yellow lights danced on the earthen kitchen floor. Her chin resting on her hands, Yong Suk sat in front of the fire, looking back over her past and thinking about the present. Fearful thoughts and memories came to her, cutting her heart to the quick. Her father had been beaten to death by the Japanese before she was born and her mother had died of hunger in an ice-cold room soon after. She herself had started work as nursemaid when she was eight and now....

She shuddered at the thought that all this was due to the

unjust deeds of human beings, not to fate. Mother had explained it all to her more than once at night school or on the way to and from the spring. That day, poking the fire, she was clearly conscious of something pouring out of her heart, like the rush of swelling water breaking through the dyke.

Though it was already late in the evening, Mother had gone to a neighbouring village 20 *ri* away. Here too, Mother spoke in the room while Yong Suk herself sat in front of the kitchen fire, listening to her voice.

Mother's shoes and shawl were by the fire, and Yong Suk with her fingernails scraped pieces of ice off her straw sandals now getting wet in the heat. The soles and the straw sides were covered in ice. Leaning the sandals against the fire, she spread the snow-covered shawl to dry beside the fire. Yong Suk thought Mother's padded socks must be wringing wet, and she wished she could suggest that Mother take them off and dry them. If the sandals were in this state, the cotton padding of her socks must be soaked right through, her feet must be dreadfully cold. And she knew that Mother, suffering with her stomach, barely ate a spoonful of rice morning and evening and went empty all day. People said that she had lived like this all her life, and that it was inevitable that she would fall ill.

Yong Suk kept thinking that it was a shame an ass like herself never got ill or felt the cold in her feet. She would have liked to have been ill in her place. She wished she could die and turn into a pair of padded socks to keep Mother's feet warm. Yong Suk was unhappy that she could not do this as she sat suppressing the tears that kept welling up in her eyes. She spread the shawl over her knees and held a sandal up to dry in each hand.

Can I take up a gun as Mother urges, and fight to liberate the country, and study and live a worthwhile life like men? Can I? No, I don't think I can. How can I, a kitchen maid, become a soldier with a gun? Or, should I go living as I am to the end of my days? Well, I'll never be free from my lot as kitchen maid if I don't fight. And if I don't, I can't keep Mother warm when she is suffering from hardships. I would do any drudgery in order to take care of her. I am not worth a penny. I don't care even if I die. I'll be happy to die doing something I like. A long life does not always mean happiness.

The cock had crowed twice by the time Mother came out into the kitchen. Yong Suk's sleepy eyes brightened immediate-

ly; she stood up gently, picked up the sandals for Mother and put the shawl around her shoulders.

"Well, then, Yong Suk. Shall we be going back? You look sleepy."

"No, I just...."

The black eyes under the moist brows sparkled.

Mother paused on the porch for a while and, looking up the field path in the blizzard, felt the warmth from her sandals and shawl. Then she pulled off the shawl and wrapped it around Yong Suk's shoulders.

"You must be cold."

"Not at all, Mother. I'm not cold."

"Well, let's put up with it. Let's put up with it even if it is cold. We'll walk together. We'll walk like this for a long time to come."

Having covered the girl with her shawl Mother set out, holding her by the hand. Her heart beating wildly, Yong Suk followed Mother out into the blizzard and the dark. As long as she was with Mother, she thought she could walk a thousand, nay, ten thousand *ri* through the night despite the snowstorm. Snowflakes stung her in the face, to be blown away by the wind. Whenever the chilly wind blew on her burning cheeks, she was wrapped in an indescribable feeling. Deeply excited, Yong Suk looked up at Mother with her moist eyes.

"Mother!"

Yong Suk buried her face in Mother's breast and hugged her. Then lifting up her face wet with tears, she exclaimed.

"Mother, now I understand. I understand why I must walk along the snowed-up path."

She sobbed, and her shoulders heaved; she had never shed tears, biting her lips even when the landlord or his wife had beat her almost every other day until the poker snapped and her hair was torn loose.

"That's enough. Don't cry now. Why, you are like a baby."

Mopping the corners of Yong Suk's eyes where the tears kept welling up, Mother looked down at her affectionately.

"Don't cry from now on, Yong Suk."

Yong Suk looked up at the snowflakes whirling like petals. They looked so beautiful, and as happy as she felt at this very moment.

"Mother!"

Her cry awoke her to reality and she winced when she

found that it was not Mother she was embracing but the stiff cold tree trunk.

There were gunshots.

Chin Il Man, now the company commander, stood with his pistol in the air beside a line of five men all of whom pointed their guns up. They were Choe Chil Song, Chin Bong Nam, Hye Yong, Myong Ok and Ok Nyo.

"Fire!"

At Chin Il Man's command they pulled their triggers simultaneously.

Bang!

This was a salute, a salute of tiny guns for Korea's Mother, Kang Ban Sok. At each report tears streamed from the eyes of Choe Chil Song, Chin Bong Nam, and Myong Ok and the whole crowd of guerrillas in the forest.

The tears trickled down Chin Il Man's dark, glossy cheeks. His eyes shut and his arm trembling, he gave the command again.

"Fire!"

The report rang through the forest and echoed far and wide, and another strong wave of sorrow swept Yong Suk's heart.

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An urgent message came from Liangkiang.

Because Han Hung Su was talking with Han In Gang who had arrived from Fuerhho, Chon Gwang Sik received the messenger.

As soon as the orderly withdrew a big-eyed man of slight build bent as he entered the camp shed with a shabby soft hat in his hand. Looking at Chon Gwang Sik's plain uniform, the visitor put his head on one side as though wondering if this was the man he had had such a hard time trying to meet. He produced a slip of paper from the outer collar of his coat. He had been through many troubles to deliver this little bit of paper. First, he had wandered across the mountains for many days to find the whereabouts of the guerrillas and then he had had to pass three or four sentry lines, and even when he got here, he had had to wait for hours to see Chon Gwang Sik. The message

was from Comrade Yun, head of the Anti-Imperialist League for Liangkiangkou. It was written in such small letters that Chon Gwang Sik could not read it without a light. He lit a lamp made of an old ink bottle, hung it on the post of the shed and spread out the slip of paper.

"Sit down by the fire and warm yourself. Oh, look, your shoes are soaked."

"I slipped off a stone while crossing the stream just now and...."

The big-eyed man seemed less strained, and lit a cigarette.

Comrade Yun started by explaining that he had hesitated several times before finally sending this message, and that he was enclosing a letter from Om Chi Hwan, platoon leader in Chu Ho Rim's Independence Army from Tunghua.

"...If you cannot send me to the guerrilla army, please let them hear my story. Then, General Kum Song will call us right away.

"On our way back from the mission to collect war funds, encountering the Japs, we narrowly escaped death. You ask Mr. Han Hung Su or Mr. Choe Chil Song. They know this well. Afterwards, I and a few other soldiers asked to be allowed to join the guerrilla army but our wish was not, at that time, granted. I believe that Commander Chu Ho Rim had been very anxious to link up with the guerrillas but had wavered, for fear of possible counter-moves by some of his subordinates. It was pro-Japanese Advisor Hwang, who had had connections with the 'Provisional Government in Shanghai' and frustrated our cause by working with the Japs. This I declared when I captured and shot him.... It is because of these fellows that we cannot achieve Korean independence. We should have eliminated these sorts of people long ago and gone our own way. Lying on the ground, his chest bleeding, Commander Chu Ho Rim told us: 'You were right. You were right when you demanded to be sent to the guerrilla army. I did not accept General Kum Song's suggestion and here I am. And I've no right to go on living because I didn't. Bury me here! Bury me here while I'm breathing. And you go to General Kum Song. The only right way for us of the Korean Independence Army is to join the General. When you visit him, he will receive you kindly. And tell him that Chu Ho Rim who committed a crime for which he deserved to die passed away before he could apologize to him. That is my last

wish.' Saying this, he wept and died. Though he stopped breathing, his eyes stayed open...." Chon Gwang Sik read the rest of the letter, though it was obvious what was coming. That night, after settling accounts with Advisor Hwang, Om Chi Hwan, taking three of his men, set out to look for the guerrillas. Later, Staff Officer Choe was said to be regrouping the few scattered companies to go towards Mt. Paekdu-san.

Having sent the messenger to his lodging, Chon Gwang Sik paced up and down the shed before going out. He had to inform the Comrade Commander of this staggering news without delay but his feet would not budge. This tiny slip of paper weighed down his hand as though it were something very heavy, mysterious. He walked round and round a nearby tree, picturing how the Comrade Commander would react to his report. First he would be stunned and then deeply regret this loss to the anti-Japanese movement. The Comrade Commander had stressed time and again the necessity of winning over the Independence Army to form an anti-Japanese national united front. So Chon Gwang Sik could easily imagine what a great shock this latest development would be to him. But he must be informed without delay so that the situation could be put right.

Chon Gwang Sik walked unhurriedly towards headquarters in the larch thicket. When he reached the top of a hill and could see the lamplight, he paused a moment. How could he hand the General this report, when he must still be mourning the loss of his mother, though he had never revealed his bleeding heart. How can I, thought Chon Gwang Sik, bring him more sad news? Now it was clear why he had been working late into the night since his return from Hsiaoshaho. Naturally, he was a busy man but he had dealt with much more work than usual these days and had covered 60 or 70 *ri* every night. He visited the villages where guerrilla bases had just been set up and made a thorough study of activities at the semi-guerrilla zones and the areas under enemy control. Then too he sat up many a night to receive messengers to learn how the political work was proceeding in northern cities such as Hamhung, Wonsan and Chongjin and in the ore and coal mines and the major industrial districts. Meanwhile, he had walked along rugged mountain paths to meet Song Dok Hyong and a few other comrades working with the National Salvation Army units. Now a horse had been found for him because he was footsore, but usually he went on foot.

As Han Hung Su had said again and again, it was sad, indeed, that Mother had died so prematurely. They should have been able to prevent her overstraining herself and have got her better medicine.

As for the tragic end of Chu Ho Rim, it could have been avoided though, as the Comrade Commander had foreseen at Tunghua, the disintegration of the Independence Army might in any case have been inevitable. Chon Gwang Sik said to himself that if he had been faithful to the Comrade Commander's intentions he would not have tormented him again about this. Already disunited, the leadership of the Independence Army would inevitably have suffered from grave dissensions which would deteriorate into bickering and fights. Therefore, he should have foreseen that people like Chu Ho Rim would be victimized, and taken the appropriate action. What was more, Chon Gwang Sik had been assigned by the Comrade Commander to stay at Tunghua for a few days after his unit departed, to find out the general view there and to deal with any outstanding problems. If he had interpreted the Comrade Commander's intentions correctly and done the right thing, he would have raised the problem of how to deal with the saboteurs who had wormed their way into the Independence Army and how in the circumstances to rally the progressive forces. He should have stayed on there for many more days, if necessary, to settle the issue. This time again he had failed to work as the Comrade Commander wished; so he had caused a loss to the revolution and hurt the leader's feeling. However, it was little use repenting and being conscience-stricken now.

Chon Gwang Sik turned round to go and see Han Hung Su. He had been so off-balance that he had forgotten he should have consulted with Han Hung Su first.

Meanwhile during their talk Han Hung Su and Han In Gang had reached an agreement that the unit should go to Fuerhho right away. They came out of the shed and ran straight into Chon Gwang Sik under a huge dried-up tree. He handed the slip of paper to Han, saying that it was about Chu Ho Rim.

"What about him?"

Gripped by a feeling that something had happened, Han Hung Su was at a loss and almost snatched the paper.

"He was assassinated by special agents. Om Chi Hwan has come over to us at last."

"Assassinated?"

"I'm to blame for it."

"So that's how he ended?"

They sat silently in the shed for a while before Chon Gwang Sik spoke up.

"You'll have to report to the Comrade Commander right away, won't you?"

Han Hung Su sprang to his feet.

"I won't. You go, Comrade Chon. I can't. We'll be hurting him even more. How could we give him one more worry, however small, at this moment of all times? That would be unforgivable. Just think of it, Comrade Chon! Even if we can't ease the Comrade Commander's grief and worries, we should.... I know you feel the same way I do.... Anyhow I just can't do it."

Han Hung Su paced round and round the campfire impatiently. Rarely had he found himself in such an awkward situation or so confused. Chon Gwang Sik understood because he felt the same way. His embarrassment at this moment, however, was no less than Han Hung Su's.

Somewhat later, Chon Gwang Sik walked up to headquarters alone.

The Comrade Commander was strolling in a thicket, the stars shining between the branches, when he spotted Chon Gwang Sik coming along with drooping head.

"Is that you, Comrade Chon?"

"Yes, it's me."

Chon Gwang Sik drew himself up immediately and looked straight in front.

"Comrade Commander!"

He took a step forward and saluted but stood petrified. Noticing something unusual about him, the Comrade Commander helped him to bring down his hand, and to ease obvious tension, asked in a gentle voice.

"Did anything happen last night?"

"No, nothing special."

Chon Gwang Sik feigned ignorance, though for a moment there flashed through his mind the messenger's return from Hsiaoshaho and Han Hung Su's memorial address over the death of Mother.

"I thought you told me you were going to hold a study

session but then I heard a great deal of firing. So I asked Comrade Pyon In Chol to find out, but he said he hadn't been able to find out anything. And today you haven't brought me any work and have avoided me all day."

"Comrade Commander!"

Chon Gwang Sik took a step back and again called in a strained voice.

"Why didn't you tell us, Comrade Commander?"

Chon's eyes had a piercing look and in his voice there was a note of protest.

"We are sorry.... We are so sorry that we were not told of Mother's death...."

By now Chon Gwang Sik had quite forgotten what he had come for and was utterly unconscious of the posture he assumed or his tone of voice.

A lump rose in his throat, and he rushed up to the Comrade Commander, imploring him as he gripped his hand.

"Comrade Commander, can't we share your sorrow?"

Many more words were in his heart which swelled with grief but he could not express them.

Lifting his face, he looked at the Comrade Commander with the tear-filled eyes, and embraced him. The Comrade Commander's throat tightened and the tears welled up in his own eyes; still locked in the embrace, he turned his face away. Pressed closely against his chest, Chon Gwang Sik muttered something unclear. Presently there was only Chon Gwang Sik's heavy breathing.

The wind blew, and leaning over, the tree branches rustled and stirred the air. The wind blew stronger and more fiercely, swaying the bleak forest which had greeted a late autumn or almost early winter. Leaves fell on the shoulders of the two men who stood in a close embrace like a statue carved out of one block, and rustled to the ground.

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Han In Gang was 22; he had lived in Fuerhho for many years.

The village of Fuerhho, between Antu and Tunhua, was

not very large, and about five *ri* away Han In Gang lived in another tiny village. The local population called it the inner village but outsiders thought of it as part of Fuerhho. There was nothing extraordinary about the village of Fuerhho but Han In Gang boasted of it at every opportunity.

Having finished his talk with Han Hung Su he went to the campfire where Platoon Three were resting and talking animatedly. His many years of underground activity enabled him to adapt himself to any situation and to make friends with people easily. Sitting by the fire with Han Hung Su, he took the opportunity to show his pride in Fuerhho. At first sight there were many points of similarity between him and Han Hung Su but their characters were entirely different. Han Hung Su was shrewd, calm and cautious while Han In Gang was rough and ready with a rather broader outlook. Han Hung Su was like a wall built of identical, exquisitely polished stone blocks; the other a fine solid wall of roughcast stone.

Han In Gang had dark brows and wore the peasant's hemp jacket so familiar in this mountain area. First he spoke of Fuerhho being between Antu and Tunhua and emphasized that it had been one of the most important places for revolutionary activities, particularly in founding the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army.

A dozen or so guerrillas who squatted round the fire were deeply interested in Han In Gang because they knew that their unit would soon stop in his village. He had noticed this, and now he paused in his talk, fished the tobacco pouch out of his pocket, crushed the yellow tobacco leaves on his palm to roll them into a thick cigarette. With heavy clouds of smoke puffing from his nostrils Han In Gang explained that until recently, or to be more exact, until the Mingyuehkuo Meeting last year, Fuerhho had been in the firm grip of reaction, and gave a number of examples.

He had worked underground for some three years in the areas around Ryongdure Street. Then, his organization sent him to his own village as the fourth underground organizer dispatched there in the past few years—his predecessors had all been given away by informers and arrested within a month.

His underground experience was no greater than theirs had been, but he readily accepted the assignment because, although uneasy and uncertain, he had a house and relations

in the village and, what was more he somehow felt responsible for his village, he could not tolerate the situation.

"I was completely at a loss, because things were in such bad shape. How could I tide over the situation? You know."

Having sought agreement by shaking the knee of Han Hung Su who was scribbling in his pocket notebook, the narrator continued:

"I went home late last year but I couldn't do anything. Every day I went to the mountain for firewood, heated the floor of the separate room, where I lay down to indulge in daydreams. My family had originally got their livelihood from the land where bushes and shrubs had been burnt away, and with several able-bodied and hardworking members, they had been reasonably well-off. Now my brothers had scattered and my family was in a poor way. Nearly a month after my return, word went round that a socialist, that is, myself, had tired of the movement and was settling down to farm. I lost no time confirming this. I said, I had been to all the 13 provinces of Korea and found nothing I could do. And I bragged: I'll burn away land for farming in a big way to make money and then move to a town. I'll farm in the summer, and in winter I'll make charcoal and fell plenty of trees. This, however, got me nowhere. And nobody opened his heart to me. Spies kept a continual watch over me, putting out feelers. So, to camouflage myself, I talked of money, money, nothing but money whenever I opened my mouth. 'I must make money. Only money will bring me comfort and buy power.' Ha, ha, ha, I went round this way day in, day out but nothing came of it. I couldn't get together with a soul who would become my comrade. So for the moment my mission to revolutionize all the villagers had to be shelved. One day there was a message from my organization. I hurried to a secret liaison centre 20 *ri* away. There, I found out that Comrade Kum Song had sent for me. He said he had been informed that I had had a lot of difficulty and proposed to go together with me to my village.

"'No, you mustn't go. Never.' I protested hotly because I was worried for his safety. As you comrades know well, immediately after the policy to take up arms was mapped out at Mingyuehku, we political workers went among the masses to get men and weapons. Antu was the centre of the activity and Fuerhho was an important junction geographically and important also because our organization was in the vicinity.

"The Comrade Commander stubbornly insisted on going. He said, 'There must be a breakthrough in order to advance, whoever makes it.' And I asked, 'Do you intend to make a quick visit or to stay there for some time?' He laughed as he replied: 'Let me decide when I get there, for if you want to catch a tiger cub you must go into the tiger's den. So far many comrades have failed because they tried to do it the easy way. We won't do that. We'll go right to the very bottom, to the lowest depth.' At that time I didn't know that he would stay in the village for long to help. He wore plain peasant's clothes, and I accompanied him on a sleigh in the midst of a snowstorm on the mountain road. We arrived at the village at dusk. One of the rooms in my house was designated as our hideout. Just as I was going to have a meal with him, my nephew came running in helter-skelter, telling me that the Japanese were coming. I rushed out of the room to find that the mounted police were already in the village. Six Japs with glistening sabres and rifles were following the sleigh track. 'What a go!' I said to myself trembling, and shot into the inner yard. He was already on the earthen porch, slipping on my tattered padded jacket. With a smile he asked me, 'Comrade Han, what do you say? Do I look like your servant?' He then came out into the yard, picked up an axe and started to chop logs on the block.

I was so utterly confused that I didn't know what to do. I could hear them kicking open the front gate, their horses breathing hard and their spurs rattling. I must put on a bold front, I thought. So, with my hands behind my back, a cigarette between my teeth I went forward and, with the utmost unconcern, asked them what was the matter."

As the cigarette went out, he blew it a couple of times, picked up a piece of glowing charcoal from the fire and lit it again.

"Oh, I see. Now I understand. Look here, Comrade Choe Chil Song. There has been a story going around like the one last spring. Do you remember when we were at Liangkiang Comrade Cha Gi Yong heard a story from one of the women?"

Chin Bong Nam asked Choe Chil Song with excitement, patting him on the shoulder.

"I had no time to hear the story. At that time I was out of my wits. Pak Hung Dok was giving me a hard time because I

couldn't answer his questions about the *Communist Manifesto*...."

Choe Chil Song who had been practising writing in his notebook rubbed his coarse beard and waited for Han In Gang to go on.

"Oh, hell. Who knows? Oh, look, Comrade Yong Suk, Comrade Yong Suk!"

Chin Bong Nam waved her to come, and tried to confirm the story.

"Take it easy, Comrade Chin."

Yong Taek checked Chin Bong Nam from behind and urged Han In Gang to go on telling his story.

"I'm not mucking up your schedule of the day. I hope?"

Han In Gang knew how to make his story effective, and deliberately interrupted his narrative for a while to keep his audience in suspense.

Then, like a carp swallowing water, he pouted his lips, puffed at his cigarette and calmly went on with his tale.

"Though I'm telling you the story now in the past, at that time I was completely bewildered like a lost soul.

"My legs trembled and everything seemed to have lost its glow and I expected the worst. I decided to fight to the death with pistol in my belt.

" 'Hey, you have a man from Antu here, haven't you?' one of the policemen yelled, glaring, sabre in his hand. He must be the leader of the gang. At this very moment we heard the sound of the General's axe. I interpreted it as a signal for me to act boldly. 'A man from Antu here? What are you talking about? Look, there's no one here save our family.' I replied nonchalantly, indicating that they might search if they wanted to. Then, the General called out 'Master!' He took a step forward, axe in hand, and said, 'Master, I don't feel well. May I stop work for today and come tomorrow?' 'Who's he?' asked the policeman looking at the shoulders of his tattered jacket. 'Your servant?' 'Yes, he is,' I said without hesitation. Meanwhile the other policemen searched every corner of the house. Banging doors, they rummaged the kitchen, closets, storeroom, and even water jars, chimney and the fireplace of the separate room. They searched two or three more houses before darkness came on, but to no purpose.

"So that was how the General became my 'servant'. That

night the General and I sat in our lighted room and laughed and laughed until our sides ached.

"The General had earlier visited Chiaoho, and when arrest was imminent he had sought shelter in a house there, where he carried a baby on his back and stoked the kitchen fire to escape notice. He said that this time he had been worse off, he had become a 'servant'. 'You hired me before even I knew,' said he with a grin. 'When I was in Harbin,' he said, 'I lived like a gentleman at a luxurious hotel—though I did have to slip out unnoticed to take my meals in cheap eating houses. So, as you see, I'm on the way down.' We laughed and laughed late into the night. Indeed, we laughed till the tears ran down our faces."

Those who had been listening in breathless suspense burst into laughter as the great danger receded and the Japanese search fizzled out. Chin Bong Nam laughed convulsively covering his mouth with his hands and Choe Chil Song sat tossing his head, his mouth wide open.

"My goodness!"

Yong Suk who had joined her comrades during the story put both fists against her breast and laughed, showing her white teeth as she heard how the Japanese had been cleverly deceived.

"You are pretty smart, Comrade Han In Gang."

Even Han Hung Su laughed, a rare thing with him.

"Don't laugh. There is nothing funny about it. Oh lord, how I sweated! I tell you after the police had gone I had to dry all my underwear—it was soaked with sweat.

"Next day I asked the General with determination in my voice, 'Please go back right away. I'll do a good job from now on.' With a smile he retorted: 'Why, master, isn't it unfair to fire me when I have only chopped firewood for one day? Let me work a month or so, then you will know how I work and, I'm sure I'll do a lot of work. Tell me where I can fetch firewood; I think I'll have to gather a whole cartload of firewood today.' This was what he said. So I had to go out for firewood. I intended to be more resolute in asking him to leave up in the mountains. He went in the same old coat, pulling the sleigh right through the village. Within a few days a rumour spread through the village: 'Since he hired a hand, he obviously has stopped participating in the socialist movement'; 'He really wants to make money; there is a saying that once someone

tastes money, he will try to get more come what may.' So I was a stingy 'master' now and the General was considered a hardworking and honest 'servant'. But it cost me many a day of embarrassment, behaving like a 'master'."

Han Hung Su who had been jotting down notes while listening to the story, closed his notebook every now and again and faced the speaker. Then Han In Gang gave one heavy sigh after another and described the sufferings of those days. However, his quick temper prevented him from presenting things methodically, it made him talk rudely and curse so many villagers.

"How disgusting those flippant housewives were! Every morning when on our way to fetch firewood, they asked us to break the ice on the path to the well. Because I had to behave as 'master' I had to stand at a distance, holding the ox, while the General obediently broke the ice with his axe, quite unaffected.

"The housewives found pleasure in this and made a fuss every day. They thought he was a kindhearted 'servant' to the whole village. How bitter I felt! Surrounded by the clamorous housewives, the General meekly broke the ice with the axe as they ordered, 'Here,' 'here.' By the time he finished breaking the ice, his face was smeared with muddy water and his clothes were all wet. And you should have seen his hands! Then I would speak ill of the women and swear at them the whole day calling them 'those cursed housewives.' He would sit by the fire and, scribbling in his notebook, tell me who was gathering wood; 'Comrade Han, we're not breaking the ice for the women, we do it for the revolution. The revolution demands many things of us. Sometimes it may make a more merciless and severe demand. The revolution may even demand that we lay down our lives. And we should do it with as little hesitation as we break the ice.' At this I would calm down, reconciled that while gathering firewood, I would be protecting the General who prepared documents or met messengers, or talked with young hired hands in the village for hours on end.

"As a 'servant' he had many a humiliating experience. One day in mid-January an old couple at the Mill House held a wedding party to receive their daughter-in-law. The snow stopped during the day. The village women bustled about, grinding grain, preparing rice-cakes and pancakes. Mr. Hong, the village elder, sent children to my house to fetch a hired

hand to do the chores; I was asked to send someone right away to make rice-cakes because more hands were badly needed. I couldn't turn down the request, for we had been trying to win over Mr. Hong, the influential elder of the village. I consulted with the General and he said he would go right away. This Old Hong is very active now as deputy head of the Peasants' Association but at that time he was a big headache. And a dangerous character, too. He used to insist that no Communist be allowed to enter the village. Otherwise, he claimed, the Japanese would carry out 'punitive operations' against the village. He maintained if a few 'ists' were arrested, it would be better than having the whole village massacred. Moreover, spies kept a close eye on the old man to find out whether there was any stranger in the village through him. He was so terrible that one day I cursed him, calling him a 'reactionary.' Then he flopped down on the ground in a flood of tears, saying that he had worked for the Korean nation, that he would hang himself, if I really believed that. I barely managed to prevent him committing suicide.

"A stone table was brought into the yard of the house where the wedding party was to be held; steaming heaps of boiled glutinous foxtail millet were being made into dough on the table and two or three men slapped it alternately with wooden pestles. Seated on the veranda rather drunk was Old Hong, a long smoking pipe between his teeth; he was craftily encouraging a competition among the cake-makers to see who could slap the hardest. It was windy after the snow, so the heaps of boiled foxtail millet would cool off instantly, making it quite a tough job to crush the small grains as they hardened. It took the cake-makers twice as much effort as usual. When their progress was slow, the women began to fret, grumbling at the weather and what not.

"Let the fellow from In Gang's do the job.' As Old Hong suggested, a young man handed the pestle to the General and withdrew, mopping the sweat off his face. Now the General had to take up the pestle.

"The cake-making will tell us how much work he can do,' said Old Hong. He looked dissatisfied. It seemed to me that he was trying to sum him up. This quite annoyed me but I could do nothing about it. The old man treated the General so offhandedly. What was more, I disliked his craftiness. I felt like cursing him and turning on my heels. The

General struck the dough with the wooden pestle a couple of times but it was a very clumsy effort.

"'By Jove,' Old Hong's lips twisted in disdain. His expression intimated that it was strange to see a hired hand handling a pestle with such a lack of skill. Angrily I snatched the pestle, saying, 'If you hurt your arm while chopping firewood, why didn't you say so?' And I hit the dough instead, I'm not much good at it either, but the villagers did not make a fuss. They just pouted, saying that I was not so skilled at the job because I was a country scholar.

"In the evening all those who had been helping were served dinner, I was not an exception; I sat in the corner of the room, in front of a small hexagonal table with some dishes and even a bowl of raw rice wine. The General was seated on the stepping stone, mending his worn-out straw sandals, but no one invited him in. Presently the mistress of the Kanggye House who was notoriously indiscreet came out of the kitchen with a big bowl full of rice-cakes. She handed it to the General, telling him he could eat his fill of cakes wherever he was. He gave an awkward smile as he took the cake-bowl from her. I was painfully angry at this treatment, this humiliation and all the other things that I knew were manifestations of class discrimination. You can understand how mad I was. What do you say about it, Comrade Han Hung Su?

"I sprang to my feet. Both my hands trembled uncontrollably and I felt the blood rush through my whole body. 'How can you illtreat a man so!' I roared. Next moment I was not conscious of what I did or what I said. Afterwards my friends helped me up, saying, 'You've spoiled the party,' 'You're stone drunk,' 'Such a sober man has now become a hooligan, and because of his ism,' 'Somebody's drunk already, so the party must be a big success.' What a fuss they made! But I was amazed to see how the mistress of the Kanggye House had reacted. This woman always had a scared look about her because of her extraordinarily large eyes; she was the fussiest woman in the village and always the first to ask us to break the ice. Crouching on the kitchen floor she wailed, covering her face with her skirt. She stressed through tears that she had given the General twice as many cakes as the others because she was sorry for the servant. Ha, ha, ha."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha. Ha, ha, ha."

"Ha, ha, ha. Ha, ha, ha."

There was another burst of laughter. Chin Bong Nam laughed until he cried, and having got his breath back by passing his hand over his chest, asked the speaker if that woman of the Kanggye House was still in the village.

Instead of laughing, Han In Gang's face turned grave. He stamped his cigarette out and gazed at the haloed moon in the sky from which snowflakes had begun to fall. As the night was far advanced and it was snowing, he added hurriedly.

"What's so funny? Propped up by my friends I crossed the yard littered with the cakes and the bowl which had been carried by the mistress of the Kanggye House. I was sick in bed for three days. On top of that, the General criticized me severely. I can't tell you his exact words, but they ran something like this: It was I who was humiliated. How can we carry out our revolutionary task if we Communists, who are supposed to change society, cannot suppress our fleeting anger and take such a reckless step? Our nation is not only humiliated; it is on the brink of destruction. While we are acting thoughtlessly many of our fellow countrymen are shedding their blood and losing their lives. It seems to me that our comrades who have worked here were as easygoing in underground activity as you. If you use violent language regardless of the place or time, stick to your own subjective views irrespective of people's political awareness, and go from house to house on polite visits in your best clothes instead of going deep down to grass-roots, you won't be able to do a thing. What you did has nothing in common with the proletarian spirit or the Party spirit....

"Later I was sincerely sorry for my blunder and criticized myself. The General carried on his work, while getting firewood as he had done on the first day, breaking the ice on the path to the well and doing all the chores for the village. All our revolutionary organizations concentrated on this formerly unknown village of Fuerhho. There was a breakthrough and the advance started. By the beginning of February when the General left, revolutionary songs were heard in the village in broad daylight. Afterwards the example set at Fuerhho was disseminated throughout the Tuman-gang River area, eventually leading to April 25th. This is Fuerhho where you'll be staying for a few days, and you'll see." Having wound up his

story Han In Gang took off his cotton coat to show the jacket underneath.

"This is the jacket. The General used to work in this horribly worn jacket."

The soldiers all rose and touched the shabby hemp jacket. They examined it carefully, back, front, collar and sleeves, as though it were something mysterious. Deep in thought Han Hung Su nodded as if to say he understood why Han In Gang was wearing it.

The snow was still falling. The great flakes fluttered softly out of the dark grey sky covering everything. They fell on the boughs, on the shoulders of Han In Gang walking alongside Han Hung Su, on the shed into which Choe Chil Song had gone to sleep, proudly shouting, "A servant, a servant!" and on the sleeves of Yong Suk who stayed beside the campfire, still grieving, though she, too, had done her share of laughing that night.

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The whole village was in a festive mood.

It was nearly 15 *ri* from the front village to the end of the valley. But Old Hong had already made two trips that day. Though well over 50 he was straight and vigorous and dressed the way middle-aged men did. Since he started his activity his extraordinarily long pipe had given way to a very short one, his wide, loose trousers had changed to tight riding breeches. Instead of the imposing horsehair cap, he wore a shabby soft hat at an angle.

Old Hong went from house to house urging people to speed up the preparations. In his opinion nothing was going well enough, everything seemed to be progressing at a snail's pace. On his way to the Mill House he ran into Han In Gol, head of the Young Communist League.

"The Peasants' Association is making a big preparation to welcome them, eh?"

Han In Gol, cousin of the district Party chief Han In Gang, sent out a feeler.

"I know what you young folk are hatching. They say you

are a sort of looking down on the Peasants' Association. That's not nice."

This retort was not unexpected, for Old Hong was too high-spirited to submit to others.

"We are just following the example of your Peasants' Association. By the way is it true that your association is going to slaughter an ox?"

"Who said so?"

He gave a glare of assumed anger but winked. He was in a happy mood.

"Everyone says so. The Peasants' Association has decided to beat the YCL, Anti-Imperialist League and Women's Association in welcoming the soldiers."

"It's you fellows who hatch plots. We don't go in for that sort of thing. Ha, ha, ha."

After parting with Han In Gol, Old Hong went straight to the Mill House. Young women with rolled-up sleeves were passing in and out. In the front yard they were soaking rice in water, and in the ox-drawn mill in the backyard they were grinding, sifting and winnowing the rice flour to make cakes. Meanwhile, in the living room elderly women were sewing; some making padded cotton clothes, others at sewing machines stitching the facings into uniforms and still others turning them inside out to put the finishing touches to them.

On entering the yard, Old Hong yelled in a cracked voice at a woman in a black jacket coming out of the kitchen.

"What do you think you are doing? My God! In the back village they've finished the tunics and padded socks already, and are working on the tobacco pouches...."

In the back village, he told them that the front village was ahead and in the front village, he said the back village was doing best. In this way, he egged them on to work faster.

The mistress of the Kanggye House who was carrying rice water in a vessel stood aside until Old Hong had passed, threw the water, and turning round, retorted.

"Brother Deputy Chief, tell me exactly. Why such a fuss? Don't tell me we are lagging behind."

She was 30 but already quite stout. Her swelling bust would soon burst her jacket, and her hips were full. Water dripped down her reddish forearms and her bare feet in a pair of straw sandals were smeared with mud. The old man was nearly twice her age, but whenever the two met, they would

argue in high-pitched voices. But, whenever he needed some help, he always came to her. She was in charge of the Women's Association organization.

Old Hong had been informed by the district Party chief that the guerrilla army would arrive this evening or early in the morning. So the preparations were not really behind but he was making much ado about it all. However, he would not give in to the women folk.

"You've been working at a snail's pace. What would you do if the guerrilla army came right now?"

"If your Peasants' Association can't do their job, hand it over to the Women's Association. We'll do it."

Provoking the old man, she winked at a member of the Women's Association of her own age who was standing nearby, a baby on her back.

"Fine. The youngsters look down on our Peasants' Association and now even the Women's Association are taking the same line. Yes? You women are peasants, too, aren't you?" Old Hong waved his pipe.

"Yes, we are, but women are women."

The amazon took a step forward, adjusting her large bun with both hands.

"Why, you! Don't you know who helped the Women's Association to exist?"

"H'm, don't you know if there were no women there would be no peasants?"

The mistress of the Kanggye House turned round and signalled to her friend with her eyes.

"How clever you are!"

Just then the children came running in and told him that the people were coming back from the market place. Pipe in hand, he ran, or rather waddled, towards the road. Two sleighs came rushing down the rise towards the village, raising a cloud of white snow.

"It looks as if they succeeded."

Old Hong's face which had coloured after the last quarrel wrinkled with delight and the tips of his drooping moustache twitched.

Soon the sleighs were in the yard. Two youths took the towels off their heads and exchanged greetings with the crowd that surrounded them. The ox with slender haunches heaved its

belly and shook its large horns. The beast was covered with snow.

"Many thanks. You had no trouble, I hope?"

"With the help of the organization there, we were able to get them out all right," a tall youth answered, mopping the sweat off his face.

"I was worried all through last night. Yours was a secret mission; you never could tell what would happen to you."

"Fortunately the snow helped us to make the best use of the sleigh road."

"Fortune smiles on Fuerhho. You know the saying: When you are lucky, even if you fall, you will find yourself in a bowl of cakes."

"You think this will do?"

Another youth opened a straw bag and took out a pair of canvas shoes which smelled strongly of rubber.

"I believe you chose the biggest ones. So that they can keep their feet warm wrapped in thick foot cloths."

Taking the shoes Old Hong looked at them in the sun, jerking his head.

"They are all size elevens or over."

"Very good, very good."

The old man nodded and grinned, revealing his yellow teeth and gums. Then someone shouted.

"There's signal from the outpost. Maybe the guerrillas are coming."

"What?"

"Over there, armed men are coming out of the forest."

"Where?"

"Over there. Now they've disappeared. Oh, look, they're back in sight."

Old Hong's small eyes goggled under the grey brows and spotted several soldiers against the background of a snow-covered rise.

"Right. They are the guerrillas."

There was another flag signal from the outpost.

"Hey, call Han In Gang. And tell our chief of the Peasants' Association. He is at Pear Tree House. And call the head of the Women's Association, too."

The villagers who had been crowding into the yard ran in all directions. People poured out of the houses. The young women who had been busy with the sewing, the housewives,

their hands white with rice powder, boys holding up their trousers as they ran, old folk swinging their arms vigorously to make up for their inability to move their feet and high-spirited youths all flocked to the main road.

Han In Gang was among the crowd. He must have just come back from a trip, his dog-fur cap pulled down over his eyes. He sent out messengers to the back village and adjacent hamlets and directed the preparations to welcome the visitors.

Meanwhile, Old Hong darted away, shouting at the Mill House that the stubborn and indiscreet hussy had made a fine mess. A few scouts came from the mountain towards the village, followed by a long line of troops, their rifles shining in the evening sun.

"Hurrah, hurrah!" A burst of cheering sounded from the village. Han In Gang rushed ahead swinging his arms wildly, followed by the leaders of the various organizations and by lots of young people.

When they reached the cart track after leaving the foot of the mountain, the guerrillas paused for a moment to regroup before marching in single file towards the village. The front contingent was already on the main road across the stream; the rear stretched out past the waterside to the foot of the opposite mountain. In the rear, was a chestnut flicking its tail, and Han In Gang immediately recognized the General on horseback.

"Villagers, General Kum Song is coming." Han In Gang shouted, turning round. He had told them that the guerrillas would come but had not revealed to anybody that the General himself was coming.

"The General?!"

Everyone cried out in astonishment. Since early last spring General Kum Song's name had been on everyone's lips whenever mention was made of the guerrilla army, but they had never seen him. Hence this unusual excitement.

At last the front ranks reached the village. The news of General Kum Song's arrival immediately spread among the waiting crowd of people whose eyes were focussed on the bay.

"Hurrah for General Kum Song!"

"Hurrah for the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army!"

There was one round of cheers after another. Children waved both hands and stamped their feet. The women waved one hand, wiping their tears with the other and the old people stretched their hands, nodding. Old Hong pushed aside a young

man standing in front of him and got up higher on the edge of the field, waving his arm.

"General Kum Song is coming. The General who will save us white-clad people is visiting this out-of-the-way place!"

Having seen the General whom he had been so anxious to meet, Old Hong was engulfed in the greatest emotion he had ever experienced.

A tall man alighted from the horse before reaching the entrance to the village. As he approached, the old man bowed in reverence, calling "General!" The General greeted him, and patting a crowd of children on the heads, went ahead.

The mistress of the Kanggye House belatedly came running out, rolling down her sleeves as she threaded her way through the dense crowd of people to the front. She ran her eyes over the line of troops from front to rear but could not recognize the General.

"But which is the General?"

She pushed aside a youth and moved close up to the armed ranks. A dark-faced guerrilla of medium height held her by the shoulders and turning her round, said: "There he is at the rear, the General."

She ran helter-skelter to the rear. However, there was no way of spotting him. The line of troops had nearly passed and the guerrillas were mixed with Han In Gang and some other villagers. Abruptly she caught hold of a woman guerrilla and asked her which one was the General. Yong Suk pointed to the General who was walking a few ranks behind, acknowledging the cheers of the people. As she saw a tall, bright-faced man in a khaki uniform, she slowly knelt down on the ground and made a grave bow.

"How are you getting along, everybody?"

Hearing his roaring voice passing over the top of her head, the mistress of the Kanggye House straightened herself up and looked in front.

"Ah!"

She stood there, thunderstruck. That face! It was the face of the man who used to raise his axe with a smile while breaking the ice on the path to the well. Yes, the same face that had looked up at her when she was carrying the bowl of cakes across the yard of the house where the wedding party was held. The voice, too, was familiar. She stood still there, shaken, gazing

the General's back. At last she called to the housewives huddled together by her side, clapping her hands.

"Oh, how strange! The General is the old servant who used to work for Han In Gang, isn't he?"

She was stunned by her own fantastic discovery and looked round, open-mouthed as if unable to accept such an absurd idea.

"What did you say?"

Grabbing her friend's shoulder, the mistress of the Puk-chong House who was a notorious scatterbrain asked in a sonorous voice.

"Sister, I've taken leave of my senses, have I not?"

"What do you mean?"

"The General looked exactly like Han In Gang's old hand...."

"Are you crazy?"

"That's why I asked you if I've taken leave of my senses."

Meanwhile, the guerrillas reached Han In Gang's yard and at the command all went off to rest. The heads of the Anti-Imperialist League, the Women's Association and other village leaders took charge of several houses to prepare lodgings for the guerrillas, while Old Hong shouted to the women and young folk to get ready to serve supper for the visitors. In every house the kitchen door was flung wide open to bring in bundles of firewood to light the fire and every well was surrounded with women drawing water. The children crowded round the guerrillas who were to stay at their houses, chatting, laughing, and making lots of noise.

At the corner of the Mill House in the back village Old Hong met the mistress of the Kanggye House who was carrying a water jar.

"Brother Hong, did you see the General?"

"Why not? I even said hello to him."

"Didn't he look familiar to you?" she asked, waiting for his reaction.

"Well, he did look a bit familiar. I've heard so much about the General that I've always pictured him in my mind. Now I find in him an excellent personality who will emancipate us white-clad people. He is young, and, well, he was born just like that. He is tall, has an intelligent look in his eyes and always has a smile hovering round his lips. I feel as if Korea is already

independent. Ha, ha, ha. Our path is now wide open for thousands, tens of thousands of miles ahead, you know."

The old man demonstrated what lay behind this by putting his unlit pipe in his mouth and taking it out again.

"But I'm sure I saw the General at Uncle Han In Gang's house last spring."

"What on earth are you talking about!"

Stepping forward the old man put out his hands as if to seize her, and breathed hard through his nose.

"Why are you so shocked, Brother Hong?"

"Why? I'll pull out your evil tongue."

"By heavens!"

"I've been thinking women really are a fearful nuisance. That absurd rumour has been going round and I've raised hell about it. But you're still talking this nonsense. I've just been to the back village because of this rumour. If you don't stop your chatter, this village of Fuerhho will make a big blunder."

As he shook his clenched fists as if to strike, the mistress of the Kanggye House fled towards the well.

"The General the same man who served Han In Gang? Oh, God damn them."

His face was red with indignation. He muttered to himself, his pipe between his teeth. "They have sharp ears, anyhow. Obviously they have heard that the poorer one is, the better one carries out revolution. But how can they compare him with a bonds slave? God damn them."

He resolved that he must beat the hell out of her, however busy, and waited for her to come back from the well with water. He warned her:

"If you talk such nonsense again, I'll break your neck."

"Now, stop, Brother."

"So the Women's Association must learn from the Peasants' Association. Do you get my meaning?"

"Oh, shut up. Until recently, you were called a 'reactionary'."

Pouting, she went past him.

Having fetched her water, she went to Han In Gang's on the pretext that she had run out of soy sauce. The General was staying at Han's house. She went into the kitchen to chat with Han In Gang's mother about various trivialities, while keeping a watchful eye on the room. Talking and laughing could be heard inside, but no opportunity arose to take another look at

the General. If only someone would ask for a bowl of water, but no one did. She popped her head into the room a few times but in vain, and went home resigned with a bowl of soy sauce; she now firmly believed nothing good came of the involvement of women in any big affair.

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Night fell.

The inner yard of Han In Gang's house had been cleared of snow and was crowded with the villagers seated on straw mats. Lanterns were hanging here and there under the eaves so that it was as bright as day. In the front row were the mistress of the Pukchong House, the owner of the sonorous voice, and her best friend, the mistress of the Kanggye House, flanked by women, married and unmarried; behind them were young and middle-aged men. Old people were offered places on the veranda to the right which was covered by straw mats. The people were chatting excitedly about the guerrillas.

General Kum Song was ushered onto the earthen porch by Han In Gang. He had had no intention of making a speech, but he had to put in an appearance here at the people's request and he would have to meet his old acquaintances.

There was the clapping of hands. The thunderous applause continued. The General took off his cap, and bent to greet the audience cordially. Then he turned to the right and went up to an old man squatting on the veranda with a long bamboo pipe in his hand. "How are you, Ogi's Grandfather?" greeted the General, taking his hand and making a deep bow.

"Ah, General!"

Ogi's grandfather put down his pipe, walked down the porch in his stockinged feet and bowed. Dozens of old men followed suit.

"Oh, it is him!" Old Hong exclaimed to himself, who was sitting with the old folk.

"How do you do, General?"

He made a bow, raising his quivering arms and then bringing them slowly down. The General drew him up, asking if he was feeling better.

"General, thanks to your care, I'm quite healthy as you see. I did my farm work on my own this year."

The old man mopped the tears at the corners of his eyes with the edge of his sleeve.

"You saved me from death.... I was born into this world again."

The General noticed that the old man was in good health, and gave him a broad smile, looking him up and down. He was hardly recognizable now. Han In Gang who was standing by his side told him that the old man was doing a good job as deputy chief of the Peasants' Association. The General again nodded his satisfaction.

As the applause died down the General took a step forward and began to speak.

"Villagers, how are you? We the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army have stopped here at Fuerhho during our long march, to see you."

A hush fell over the audience.

Referring to the significance of the founding of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army, Comrade Kum Song stressed that the village of Fuerhho had played an important role in this. In setting up the revolutionary bases, also, Fuerhho had offered a highly valuable experience. Once the situation here had been difficult, but now the whole of the village had been revolutionized and had set a valuable example in the early stage of setting up bases. This clearly showed that where counterrevolution had been liquidated, the revolutionary masses' enthusiasm and creative energies grew into a formidable force. He went on in the following vein: However vicious Japanese imperialist rule, if we work the same as we did in Fuerhho we can defend our zones with our own efforts and prevent enemy intrusion. Here in this village, there is a guerrilla or a Red Guard in almost every family and everyone who can do political work is in one or another organization, conducting revolutionary activity.

"Well, what do you think of it?" The General asked, looking round at the audience after explaining briefly the basic problems.

"If the evil landlords allied with the Japanese imperialists were allowed to stay on, if secret agents were allowed to run roughshod over you and if we allowed people to go on believing that 'punitive operations' are inevitable because of the 'ists', what would Fuerhho have been like?"

"It would have been destroyed."

"It would have been burnt to the ground by 'punitive operations'."

Nodding agreement to the replies coming from the crowd, he continued.

"So, what is the other lesson we drew from Fuerhho? It is that only the revolution can save us. To live we must make revolution, to free the homeland we must make revolution and we must make revolution in order to build a socialist society so that we can put an end to oppression and exploitation once and for all. We were born in a revolutionary age. We were born for the revolution."

While analysing the experiences gained in the remote mountain village of Fuerhho, Comrade Kum Song was thinking over the great plan for the next stage—to raise the revolution to new heights. As he looked round the audience, a bold new line flashed across his brain, a line linking Fuerhho with Wang-ching in the east.

As he had planned, Comrade Kum Song went into detail about how to strengthen the guerrilla army and what was to be done at the revolutionary bases. Then he wound up his short speech.

"Villagers, how could we achieve all these successes? We have this glorious village of Fuerhho, we are able to have a happy gathering here today because all of you readily accepted the revolution and so kindly helped and looked after me."

At this moment his eyes happened to rest on the tearful countenance of the mistress of the Kanggye House. The woman sprang up to her feet and elbowed her way through the crowd towards him.

"General!"

The round-faced woman, tears in her eyes, prostrated herself on the ground with outstretched arms.

"Please forgive me. I didn't know anything about it and at the well and...on the wedding day I...."

The General hurriedly raised her to her feet, holding her arm and uttered softly.

"You needn't ask my forgiveness. As a matter of fact you helped me. Your attitude protected me from the eyes of secret agents. And the path to the well was so slippery at that time that we could hardly walk down it. And then you gave me twice

as many cakes as other people, though without a small dining table, didn't you?"

Laughing aloud he turned her round to face the people.

"So we must work hard so that there will be no world where bondslaves are ill-treated, mustn't we? Now go back to your seat."

As the General looked round as though for agreement, the mistress of the Pukchong House clicked her tongue and reproached her friend for crying on this of all days, pulling her down by the hand.

Repeatedly expressing thanks for the hospitality accorded the guerrillas, the General mixed with the crowd of people. The guerrillas gave a performance. They danced and sang, and the yard was alive with laughter, hand clapping and cheers. Even in this atmosphere everyone seemed to have his own business to attend to. Drying her tears on her sleeve, the mistress of the Kanggye House looked elated; she went to Old Hong who sat on the veranda watching the show, and gestured to him that he could pull her tongue out if he wanted.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I say. I have poor eyesight. It is quite natural for a man to make such a mistake. Whoever would have imagined that the General could have been the 'servant'? You understand me."

"Now, repeat your fuss over our Women's Association."

"You win, you win. When people get old, they all become like me. When I was ill in bed, he asked after my health for more than ten days, and I didn't recognize him. You'll understand, when you're as old as I am."

Old Hong looked frustrated for the first time in his life. He also rose to his feet to see somebody.

"Now I see why you got so angry and turned over the dining table."

The white-haired old master of the Mill House went up to Han In Gang, who stood clapping his hands, and reminded him of the wedding day.

"I made a blunder that day. I couldn't bear to see the General treated like that. That's why I burst out in anger, not knowing what I was doing. I'm hot-tempered, you know. Forgive me anyhow, for spoiling your party."

Han In Gang was so happy he couldn't stop talking. At this moment, elbowing him aside, Old Hong went through to Chon Gwang Sik. The old man had perceived that he was one

of the cadres of the guerrilla army to whom he might open his heart.

"May I talk to you a minute?"

With a serious face, he pulled Chon Gwang Sik by the sleeve out of the main gate. On reaching the mud wall near which two tall pear trees stood, he started talking, panting slightly.

"I want you to do me a favour. Excuse me for being so brazen, but would you please send my message to the General? My nickname is 'old reactionary'. This was given by Han In Gang. Last winter I told him: If you want to conduct communist activity you may, but not here at Fuerhho, because everyone, young and old, will get killed by 'punitive operations'. Then he cursed me, calling me an 'old reactionary'. I suppressed my rage because his father was my best friend, but I was really angry.

"A few days after the wedding party at the Mill House I fell ill. My body was as hot as fire and I could hardly breathe and then I lost consciousness. As I learned later I had suffered from a kind of fever. They say my neighbours were afraid to come to see me. The villagers even planned to dig up the frozen earth to prepare my grave. One day Han In Gang and his 'servant' visited me. Not a servant but the General—excuse my language. For ten days or so he came to see how I was. Han In Gang would return home in the evening. Just the same the General would stay on, looking after me and administering the medicine he had bought for me, sitting up all through the night. It is thanks to his care that I am alive today. Otherwise, I would have gone to the Land Beyond a long time ago. If I had died then, I would have been unable to see the General or the guerrillas. From then on I was on intimate terms with the General.

"One day I told him that Han In Gang was a bad fellow and advised him not to serve him any more and desert him. But it was not so long before I stopped saying that there should be no 'ist' in the village, before I stopped abusing Han In Gang. I'm not really bad by nature, you know. Please offer him my apologies for my terrible mistake. And tell him that I was saved by the General and...."

Old Hong thrust his hand into his jacket and took out a small packet.

"This is just a little thing. My hobby is hunting, and while

chasing the game I got this in the mountain. Please give it to the General."

He crouched down and opened the packet on his lap. First he unwrapped a piece of cloth and then some sheets of paper.

"I guess this is quite old but it's not very big." He held up the contents of the packet. A white wild *insam* root with a long stem shone in the moonlight.

"Tell the General I wish him a long, long life."

The old man's hands holding the *insam* root shook imperceptibly. Chon Gwang Sik straightened himself and faced Old Hong. The plain old peasant cut such a noble figure in his eyes that when he came up to him, he stepped back, holding out his hands.

"I can't accept it. Come along with me to the General and give it to him personally."

Meanwhile, as soon as the performance was over, Comrade Kum Song had climbed the hill at the back. He wanted to see that small, spring-like cave which carried such wonderful memories—while working as "servant" he used to come up here with the sleigh; it was in this cave that he would prepare documents and meet political workers from other places. This was not the only hide-out he had had, and he did not know why it had awakened memories in his mind so strongly this day.

He walked slowly along the traceless snow-covered lane to the hilltop. The whole world lay under the white snow. At the entrance to the cave was the familiar toothache tree, its branches ornamented with snow flowers just as it used to be. After taking a look at the interior of the cave, he went up to the top of a rock and gazed at the undulating mountain ranges far in the distance. A gust of wind suddenly rose in the hazy moonlight, driving the powdered snow northwards. As he stood, arms akimbo, looking at this austere sight unfolding in semi-darkness, his noble spirit was imprinted on his face.

Han Hung Su was guarding him at a distance. At one moment, the General seemed to be steeped in memories of this night, of this cave where the past merged with the present; the next moment he seemed to be pondering over the ordeals the approaching winter would bring. At any rate Han Hung Su could see the joy and confidence in his eye.

Climbing down the hill the General looked round for the old sleigh road. Spotting Han Hung Su, he stopped and waved to him to come over. Walking alongside Han Hung Su he

talked about such trifles as the winter in this part of the world and about how he felt when walking through the snow at night. Then, abruptly, he asked him about Chu Ho Rim.

"Comrade Han, let's send out a man to save the Independence Army troops from crisis and protect Chu Ho Rim's family. He didn't live in vain. On the contrary, he took a patriotic course, though difficult and sad. We have a lot of things to do for the coming generation but I think we have things to do for the older generation, too."

Han Hung Su replied that he would do so but that he must have time to pick out the right man for the mission. At that moment he slipped off the path and almost plunged into a snowdrift but managed to keep his balance by grabbing the Comrade Commander's hand. The Comrade Commander laughed aloud, asking what he would do if he was already slipping and falling when the winter had only just begun. Covered all over with snow Han Hung Su again slipped. He held on to a bough for support, laughing boisterously.

The unit was at the top of the Laoyehling Range where four districts, Tunhua, Yenchi, Wangching, and Ningan met.

The enemy had been in constant pursuit, but for a week now nothing had been seen of him. The unit had lost sight of the enemy, which was very dangerous.

The Comrade Commander had sent for Choe Chil Song and now he walked back and forth in the shed, thinking about dispatching political workers to various places. It was odd that the Kwantung Army units who had been moving southeast towards the Tuman-gang River should stay in the Tunhua area for no apparent purpose. Unlike the Ranam Division who were scattered along the Tuman-gang River, these troops had been active at Changchun, Mukden and other places since the "September 18 Incident" and were in high spirits, having gained some combat experience. It was just possible that they might suddenly descend on the Tuman-gang River. They had fought no battles, but had committed savage atrocities against the Chinese people, and might well overrun our bases cold-bloodedly. On the other hand, the "Chientao Expeditionary Force" used their unfamiliarity with mountain warfare as a pretext to keep out of the hills, and stuck to "punitive operations" against farming villages in the Yenchi, Wangching and Holung districts. But now there had been no enemy movement for days. The reconnaissance report indicated that the Japanese were keeping to barracks or huddling round civilian houses; there was no sign that they might take to the mountains.

The press was less clamorous these days. It carried no reports on the movement of the main forces, carrying merely brief mention of the small-scale scuffles to gain weapons that occurred in various areas. In line with the "Cabinet's policy" laid down last spring, the Japanese were busy reinforcing their troops and military installations, training units for mountain warfare and hobnailing their jackboots. There was a hush, an ominous hush like the lull before a storm. Immediate action was

essential to lure the enemy into the mountains now, to give him no respite.

At the sound of footsteps Choe Chil Song appeared out of the darkness. Comrade Kum Song noted his brisk and accurate movements with a satisfied smile and slapped his shoulder.

"Let's go in," he said.

In the shed he asked Choe Chil Song how he was getting on in his army life and picked up a pamphlet from a log table. Choe Chil Song said he had spent the last few days resting after a long interval and this evening he had been duplicating handbills. He added that the guerrillas were saying that with the enemy out of sight they might well expect trouble.

"Good. We'll discuss it later. What books have you been reading?"

"Nothing special."

For the last few days he had been reading a pamphlet entitled *What Is Socialism* but he did not have the courage to say so.

"Nothing special?"

Comrade Kum Song was well aware that he always spent his odd moments reading, and thought that his reading ability had increased considerably.

"I've been busy for some time and I haven't been able to see you. Now let's read together. Have you ever seen this booklet?"

He held out the pamphlet which had been lying on the table. Choe Chil Song glanced at the cover.

"This is the *Communist Manifesto*."

Suddenly he felt his heart throb rapidly and his voice disappeared in his throat.

"Have you read it?"

"No, I haven't."

Choe Chil Song told him that when he first met Pak Hung Dok, he was scared stiff because he did not know about the *Communist Manifesto*. Comrade Kum Song poured boiling water for him out of the kettle and laughed at his story.

"So Comrade Pak Hung Dok gave you a hard time, eh? I wonder whom he is giving a hard time to now."

At the mention of Pak Hung Dok, Comrade Kum Song expressed anxiety as to how he was faring and said he would have to send someone to find out. Then he asked Choe Chil Song to read aloud from the booklet. Holding it in both hands and

blinking a few times, Choe Chil Song read out the *Communist Manifesto*, in a faltering voice.

"A spec-tre is haunting Eu-rope—The spec-tre of Communism...."

He read syllable by syllable, and almost unintelligibly. It was not the first time he had read aloud for the Comrade Commander, and he was surprised himself that he was so inarticulate.

"Read slowly, and get the meaning."

Controlling himself Choe Chil Song went on to the next paragraph.

"All the Powers of old Europe have entered into a holy alliance to exorcise this spectre: Pope and Czar, Metternich and Guizot, French Radicals and German police-spies...."

The Comrade Commander raised his cup but put it down again and listened with his eyes half closed.

First Choe Chil Song stuttered badly like a wheel off the track, but gradually he became more coherent, reading line by line. The hoarse voice emanated from thick lips and rang through the shed, vibrating the tranquil air. His reading which had begun quietly as a thin stream gradually passed through the shallows to become a dynamic current.

Eyes shut and patting his lap rhythmically with his hand, the Comrade Commander listened in silence. Choe Chil Song, though faltering once in a while, was reading much more fluently, excellent, in fact, for someone who had only just learned to read.

Time passed.

Comrade Kum Song opened his eyes and looked into the fire that was now a red glow of charcoal, a smile hovering round his lips. He enjoyed excitement and boisterous laughter, yet he was equally happy when absorbed in deep meditation in a quiet atmosphere like this.

Until quite recently Choe Chil Song had been illiterate; he had left home with a rucksack on his back because he had loathed the landlord who maltreated him, forced him to do back-breaking labour, starved and beat and kicked him around. Now he held a pamphlet on his lap, could read it freely, a pamphlet that contained the greatest idea humanity had ever produced.

His eyes fixed on the fire, Comrade Kum Song listened to Choe Chil Song's vigorous voice; he was thrilled at the thought that this great idea was reverberating throughout the homeland

at this very moment, through the lips of a guerrilla. The green hill of national freedom and independence could be seen in the far distance. Only when that hill was crossed would the majestic summit of socialism come into sight. The words Choe Chil Song was reading out were part of the glorious course of history. First we must break through a sea of fire to win back our homeland from the imperialists, then we will have to grapple with the historic task of creating and building a socialist system. As Cha Gi Yong once said, we must improve everything that is backward and restore all that we have been deprived of, we must show our creative zeal and talents. This will be a legitimate blow to those who despise us.

We Korean people will work and live the way we want, according to our own beliefs.

Our land is soaked with the blood of our people. But when our day comes, we will heal this land bruised by the aggressors, by the sweat of our brows. In creation too, we must not lag behind others.

He gazed, abstracted, at the swaying flames. Then he straightened up. "Good!" he said smilingly at Choe Chil Song. Choe raised his eyes from the book and looked at the Comrade Commander. When their eyes met, the Comrade Commander smiled again and Choe looked down and blushed.

"You read well. You have been working hard."

He praised him several times before proceeding with their conversation. It was agreed that when Choe Chil Song had finished the pamphlet they would discuss it. Then Comrade Kum Song asked him what he thought of their present quiet life in the sheds here. Choe answered that it saddened him. And when Comrade Kum Song asked him why, he answered that our quiet life meant "punitive operations" against the population in the guerrilla bases.

"Yes, you are quite right."

He stood up and, pacing up and down the shed, said.

"If you stay here in peace, the Japanese imperialist army of aggression will attack Ssoksae Valley and overrun the thatched-roofed hovel where you slept. The company there will resist, of course, but they will hardly be able to hold the enemy back because they are too few in number and not properly trained. Then the Japs will shoot your ailing father, your beloved wife and your newborn child."

His eyes, reflecting the fire, seemed to be giving off a fire of their own.

"So what should we do in this situation, Comrade Choe Chil Song? What must be done to strengthen the guerrilla army and defend the people?"

"We must hit the enemy."

"How?"

Choe did not answer.

"How should we hit him?"

No answer.

"It's simple. We must lure him out so that he can't attack the bases. You've duplicated the handbills, haven't you? Let's go into the enemy's lair. Deep into his lair. And throw him into confusion. Then he will follow us into the mountains."

Choe Chil Song's heart beat violently. Comrade Kum Song again explained in detail the objective of their present winter march.

At about two o'clock Choe Chil Song went back to his shed. He lay down on his bed but could not sleep and spent a wakeful night.

In the morning, after breakfast, dressed in peasant clothes, he left the unit with a string bag bulging with handbills. Yong Suk went with him.

*

*

The following day Se Gol left, with several colleagues assigned to different zones. They went in the opposite direction from Choe Chil Song.

Se Gol was going to stop at Wangching and Lohsing with messages and then on to Ryongdure Street. He did not know a soul at Wangching, but he was looking forward to meeting Pak Hung Dok at Lohsing and to getting newspapers and magazines at Ryongdure Street.

Dressed in worker's clothes, with a cap on the back of his head, he kept walking 100 *ri* a day towards Yungping. He was searched by the enemy several times, but this did not worry him at all. He was adventurous by nature. As though born for this

sort of thing, he had diverse ways of dealing with every critical moment.

At the entrance to Yungping he was stopped by the sentry. He gave him the password and was immediately taken to Pak Gi Nam.

"Ah, you are from the mountain? Many thanks." The chicken-breasted, thick-necked Pak Gi Nam opened his arms to embrace Se Gol.

"The Comrade Commander is well, I hope?"

"Yes, he is fit."

He told him how the Comrade Commander was faring, and Pak Gi Nam was moved almost to tears. Then he calmed down and produced his tobacco pouch.

"This is the way we live. Have a smoke. But I think we are better off than you in the mountain."

He ground the tobacco leaves, tore a piece of newspaper and rolled a cigarette. Se Gol who had not had a cigarette for some time, rolled himself a very thick one. Puffing clouds of smoke at each other, the two exchanged information on the unit and the base.

A crowd of people was murmuring outside. The evening sky seen through a small window looked as if shrouded with a dark grey veil and huge flakes of snow were falling.

"The weather is favourable."

Pak Gi Nam with a black chin said cheerfully as he explained to Se Gol, who was looking out of the window.

"The people are gathered here to fight the battle of the harvest. This is the grimmer side of our life. We have to fight several battles for every tiny foxtail millet field we harvest. The enemy is watching the fields so that we can't harvest. And though the mountains are already covered with snow, we have only brought in half our harvest. If we have no provisions, it means the end for us. As Marx pointed out, man must eat before he can have institutions and ideas, right? Sometimes there are casualties, of course. But we must bring in the harvest. For without provisions, there can be no revolution. Head of the Shock Brigade, are you going?"

Sticking out his head through the small lattice window, Pak Gi Nam asked how many people had come from different platoons and who was missing.

"I have a guest now. I'll be following you right away. You must finish Zone Three before the heavy snow comes. Fortuna-

tely it's cloudy. But when it gets dark, you can hardly tell which is which. Anyway, go ahead."

Pak Gi Nam pulled up the pistol which had been swinging on his hip and rubbed his high forehead with a handkerchief. He was perspiring despite the snow.

"Do you have a 'punitive mission' here often?" Se Gol asked, realizing that the situation was far more strained than he had expected.

"It's not as bad as it was. After the shattering blow at Ssoksae Valley they raid here less frequently. But you can never tell what they are plotting. Even now, as soon as there is the hum of truck engines their machine guns start up."

"May I go with you?"

"No, don't come. Because you have been with the unit, you'll only be discouraged by the scene. We are fighting harvest battles with sheer obstinacy. We fight their machine guns with a few flintlocks, shotguns, sound-bombs and the like. On top of that those fellows of the National Salvation Army are causing us trouble. They are grouped beyond that mountain, and two of our companies always have to guard against them. A comrade named Li Chol Gun—maybe you know him—is our representative, and he is always with them. If they hadn't been bothering us, we wouldn't have been so hard pressed as now. I'm rather hot-tempered, and I just can't tolerate them; I've suggested repeatedly we should have it out with them once and for all, but Comrade Li Chol Gun insists that we must persuade them to take joint action with us. They keep raiding our villages and robbing the people of provisions. They're absolute blackguards. Well, there we are. Go to your billet and have a good rest today, Comrade Messenger. You'll get a briefing on the situation here and see it for yourself."

Pak Gi Nam took his towel off the wall, hung it over his neck and looked round to see if he had had everything he needed.

"I'll come with you and see. Since I'm here, I have to live the way you do. I'm not that tired, I've only walked about 50 *ri* today."

"As you wish. I mustn't dampen your ardour. Comrade Li Chol Gun will be back this evening or tomorrow morning, so you can discuss your business with him. I'm only his assistant, you know."

They walked along a field path.

"When you go back to your unit, tell the General about the situation here exactly as you see it. As I said, we've got our headaches just now, we are having a hard time because of the National Salvation Army. That's entirely because we made a wrong report. If we had informed that they are blackguards, the General wouldn't have instructed us to form a united front with them. This is the headache. They are cunning enough to make use of us. They often send us threatening letters. An ignorant friend is as terrible as a foe, as they say. That's definitely true in our case. Curses upon them! Here we are. After this rise is what we call no man's land. The enemy can't take it; and we also move in and out of here."

Pak Gi Nam spoke without a stop. He was passionate, and had a wide range of knowledge. He seemed to be talking off the cuff, at random, but what he said dovetailed to the last detail; he was meticulous in tying up any subject however ramified. But gradually Se Gol felt a sort of hollowness about him, in spite of himself.

As they crossed the rise they came face to face with fields spreading over a gentle slope on either side of the road. On one side was a bean field and on the other a foxtail millet field bordering on a millet field.

The harvest shock brigade consisted of about 50 people, half of whom were women.

"Auntie, don't make noise. If the enemy hears you, he will fire again." Pak Gi Nam called out to the women who were chatting on the edge of the field.

"Oh my, why do you always talk to me like that, Mr. Pak? The enemy fire at us because they are wicked, not because I talk. You mean we can't talk out loud in the base? Is that what you mean?"

The woman laughed, looking round her group.

Pak Gi Nam also laughed in amazement, rubbing his unshaven chin.

"If you are afraid of trifles, you can't do a thing." A tall, oval-faced woman of about 30 looked askance at him as she tightened her belt around the top of her skirt. She was from Toljae. Her husband had been killed during a "punitive operation" a month ago and she had drifted into this base with her three children. She said she had always been rather quiet before, God knows why, but here at the base she was a real chatterbox. By her side stood Tak Jae Bong, a stocky member of the Anti-

Imperialist League, who would often be attacked by this Women's Association member, Aunt Buoknyo.

"Get out of my way, Brother. Don't you know man and woman have equal rights? You always behave indiscreetly in front of women."

Tak Jae Bong, known as the Bear because he was strong enough to carry five straw bags of rice at one go, grinned, showing his protruding teeth. Eventually he was forced to stand in the back row. Having driven him away Aunt Buoknyo laughed out loud, stroking the shoulder of a girl called Gum Sil who stood in front.

They started to mow the foxtail millet. Sentries were posted here and there. Along the dyke of the field there was a shelter dug almost chest-deep.

Pak Gi Nam advised Se Gol to watch the work at a distance but he took up a sickle and joined in. A former lumberjack, Se Gol was very clumsy at mowing although he was good at chopping wood. However, he was young and much too proud to lag behind others. What was more, this sort of work at the base was worthwhile. He rolled up his sleeves, spat on the handle of the sickle and got going.

In fact this was hardly a harvest; you had to take several paces to every few stalks of foxtail millet. The pungent smell of scorched grain still hung over the field. Since early autumn the Japanese had been spreading paraffin over the fields and setting fire to them, and they had driven horses over the rest, or their infantry had overrun them in their "punitive operations". The people of the base had watched from the mountaintops and wept, scratching their chests. Now they had to come down in the evening to clandestinely harvest what they had sown.

Se Gol strode ahead, grabbing and mowing as he went the stalks whose leaves had been shrivelled by fire and whose ears had been scorched black. Sweat trickled down his forehead. The heavy breathing of the shock-brigade members could be heard here and there. Everyone moved forward in silence, working swiftly. In the wake of the mowers came the delivery team. As soon as the stalks were mowed, they tied them in bundles, and carried them to the mountain on A-frames.

When Se Gol straightened up, Pak Gi Nam caught up with him and whispered.

"How do you feel? A grim life, isn't it?"

"It's virtually a battle."

"No, it isn't. The battle will start soon. Maybe in ten minutes or so."

"Anyhow it's grand."

"Look over there. That's the shock brigade from Zone Five. And to the right is the shock brigade from Zone Seven."

"This is inspiring."

"Since the emergence of the earth, nay, since men first farmed the land thousands of years ago, never has there been a harvesting like this. I'm not well educated, but I have read quite a few history books. Never, however, have I read or heard such a thing. Korea is unique, indeed. To be more exact, the fighting Korean people live in this new way in every aspect of their life. If human history is the history of the class struggle, our people are in the forefront."

"You might well say that."

Se Gol wiped the sweat from his face and picked up the sickle again. Flashing like lightning, the sickles moved on and on along the furrows. Two tracts of earth of over a thousand *pyong* were soon finished and the people had moved on to the third field, when the bullets began to fly. The noisy gun-reports rang out sounding like a taut wire strained to breaking point and plucked by the human hand. Unlike in the forest, the reports of the gunshots sounded more furious and ominous. However, no one left the field.

The clatter of the guns increased gradually. Then the women began to sing. Aunt Buoknyo must have joined in, for there was a conspicuous contralto.

...
*Let's go out bravely for the proletarian revolution,
We'll be winning a new society soon.*

They sang, and hurried on with their work. Though broken time and again there was something stirring about their song. The members of the shock brigade moved ahead rapidly, as they sang. They had become accustomed to this way of life, and stepped up their work without the least confusion.

Pak Gi Nam shook his clenched fists at the enemy who kept sending over bullets.

"You'll see, you bastards. You think we're going to leave the grain here for you, do you, you dirty Japs?"

Se Gol moved forward, wielding his sickle. Songs could

be heard from Zone Five and Zone Seven, too. The voices reverberated powerfully through the grey vastness that seemed to be neither heaven nor earth. The sound of guns became noisier and noisier. Dots changed into lines and the lines crisscrossed. Streaks of fire passed ceaselessly through the air.

"Heave, comrades. Heave!" Pak Gi Nam yelled impatiently but no one left the field. The mower's eyes seemed to be shooting fire.

"Hurry up!"

As the enemy bullets spattered close to their feet and whizzed past their shoulders, Pak Gi Nam pulled out his pistol and fired. This was the final signal. The Red Guardsmen who had been watching the situation from the mountaintop on either side of the plain opened fire at the enemy while the shock workers ran down the slope or jumped into the shelter. The sound of gunfire shook the whole valley. Someone groaned in the middle of the field.

"Who is it?"

Pak Gi Nam darted out of the shelter. Tak Jae Bong was writhing about on the ground, gripping the stalks of foxtail millet. Se Gol carried the wounded man to shelter on his back. He put Tak down and examined the wound. He had been hit in the thigh and was bleeding. The blood dripped on the snow-covered bottom of the shelter. Meanwhile our fire continued.

Even after sending Tak Jae Bong back to the village, the members of the shock brigade did not disperse.

"Well, let's go back. This is enough for today. I believe we've fulfilled our assignment."

Though ordered home, no one went.

"Come on!"

So Guk Bo, the very lanky head of the shock brigade, pushed Gum Sil's back.

"I'm not going."

"What are you going to do, if you don't?"

So Guk Bo spoke through his nose.

"You want me to go back to make them happy?"

A young, roaring voice rang from the front.

"You want us to go back, Head of Shock Brigade?"

Aunt Buoknyo protested, getting up from the bottom of the shelter, supporting herself with her hand.

"We harvest one field, and look at the mess we are in! A

man got killed and, today, another was wounded in the thigh. How can we go back?"

Se Gol felt his chest was about to burst. He could see the blood-soaked footsteps on the furrows. He trembled violently.

"Comrade Pak Gi Nam, let's raid them."

"Raid them?"

"Only after we hit them can we work without worrying. Look at these people. None of them want to withdraw."

"Let's leave the enemy be. We'll finish our work for today and seize another opportunity to come here."

"Let's hit them."

Se Gol insisted, shaking his clenched fist.

"The enemy outnumber us. As strong as two companies put together. If we attack them it'll be like hitting a beehive. It'll invite serious reprisals, wave after wave of 'punitive forces'. Then there'd be no harvest battle, everything in the valley would simply be destroyed."

"We must hit them. There'll be no enemy reinforcements."

"Why not?"

"There won't be any to send. They have gone to the mountains. They have been inveigled there by the Comrade Commander's tactics."

"Really?"

The people supported Se Gol's proposal to raid the enemy.

"He says General Kum Song has decoyed the 'punitive forces'. When should we attack them if not now?"

"Let's hit them anyhow. I can't bear this."

Someone was coming up behind them. It was Li Chol Gun. He had brought a platoon to help them in their battle. Pak Gi Nam introduced Se Gol, who handed him a message. Li Chol Gun, tall and broad-shouldered, switched on his torch and sat on the field dyke to read it. Concisely, the Comrade Commander had written it himself. It read as follows:

"...Almost all the Japanese imperialist 'punitive forces'—the troops of the Ranam Division and the Kwantung Army—are now deployed on the northeastern ranges of Mt. Paekdu-san. Guerrilla zones, liberated areas, should seize the opportunity to expand. The more our liberated areas embrace the revolutionary masses, the more we will disperse and weaken the enemy.

"It is advisable to put the companies formed in different

areas under a single command and set up a battalion for each zone...."

On reading the message, Li Chol Gun was so touched that for a minute or two he was speechless. Then he looked up and there was a twinkle in his eyes. All of a sudden his body strained in humble reverence for the Comrade Commander as though he was standing before him. Presently Li Chol Gun pressed both hands against his chest, a somewhat awkward movement for a tall and brusque man, and stood gazing at the distant mountains.

Se Gol took off his coat, and out of a seam in the back he produced something wrapped in sheets of paper.

"This is also from him."

Li Chol Gun opened it immediately. He spread out the double paper wrapping to show two notebooks with red covers. On the first page was written "Study is the revolutionary's first task."

"Take this, Comrade Pak Gi Nam. I'm certain it's for you."

Pak Gi Nam took it with both hands. Li Chol Gun stood silent, staring at the far-off mountains.

"Comrade Commander," he said in a shaking voice.

Soon afterwards smoking cigarettes, they squatted on the snow-covered rise and planned a raid against the police.

Spurred on by the Comrade Commander's message Li Chol Gun ordered the platoon to line up and strode up to them. He told them emphatically that they would take action that night to wipe out the police force at Tosong Valley five kilometres away, and thereupon led the soldiers to their destination. Se Gol and Pak Gi Nam followed him.

The next morning after the police force was smashed, Se Gol went on his way. On the outskirts of the village he saw many people in the valley where the harvest had been reaped the previous night. Most spectacular was a group of the Children's Corps. Red scarfs round their necks, children of around ten were in the field with sickles in their hands. When Se Gol got there, Li Chol Gun was greeted by Paek Gwang Myong of the strong spectacles, who, with rifle on shoulder, had been watching the enemy from the edge of the field. When Li Chol Gun introduced Se Gol as the messenger sent by the Comrade Commander, he approached him and saluted politely.

Presently the Children's Corps members sang a song.

*The revolution has come,
The revolution has come....*

"They are in very high spirits."

As Se Gol commented, Paek Gwang Myong replied proudly:
"Not too bad."

In a khaki uniform and leggings and with a rifle on his shoulder, he was a different man. His clothing was more modest and simpler than before. His face which had always tended to look gloomy was now glowing with pride. Perhaps a little too much so but still, it did not give a bad impression. His eyes especially were conspicuous. They were as clear as the blue sky and honest and they had a spark of intelligence.

As he looked towards the field, his silver-rimmed spectacles flashed. He seemed proud that the stirring harvest, the fruit of their struggle, was being brought in at such a high price.

When Se Gol was bidding farewell to Li Chol Gun, Paek Gwang Myong followed him and said quietly.

"Please give my best regards to the General."

Se Gol took a narrow path across the field.

At the foot of the mountain across from where the Children's Corps were working, the members of the Women's Association were reaping millet. Bursts of laughter broke out from time to time and Aunt Buoknyo's deep voice could be heard above the rest.

Se Gol walked along the road in a very cheerful mood. His cap was stuck precariously on the back of his head and looked as though it might slip off at any moment. His slightly protruding forehead and his snub nose made his ever-smiling face pleasantly impressive.

He was on his way to Ryongdure Street to collect the papers. He was going to get the latest newspapers and magazines and he had agreed to get what Pak Gi Nam wanted. He had talked with Pak Gi Nam till late last night. He told Pak that the other day there had been a hot debate on guerrilla tactics back at the unit. Then Pak Gi Nam said he had seen a good book on guerrilla tactics. This aroused Se Gol's curiosity: He asked where he could get it. Pak Gi Nam had once read a book entitled the *Experiences of Guerrilla Warfare*. It had been long time ago and he did not remember it exactly but it had described various battles in detail. He said he thought that a friend of his called

Chang Du Man who lived in Ryongdure Street still had the book. And he added confidently that if he met him he could get it from him. Se Gol who was always raring for excitement was gripped by an immediate desire to possess the book. Once he had it, he would give his comrades another surprise. This would be a much greater accomplishment than the device that had once enabled his comrades to catch so many fish in Sudong Valley. This would be a tremendous political gain for him, which would make Han Hung Su, who was too stingy with his praise, shout for joy, flinging up both arms. He was in high spirits. When he was 30 *ri* away from Ryongdure Street, he decided to stay the night and put up at an isolated mountain shed.

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Meanwhile, around this time, Choe Chil Song was driving an ox-sleigh and was about to cross the bridge leading into Tunhua.

He was wearing an overcoat, his head tied with a towel soaked with muddy water. He wore trousers ripped at the knee and a pair of hemp-rope sandals. Stooping low, with a whip in his hand he drove the sleigh loaded with firewood. He had to break through the enemy cordon to get in touch with the Young Communist League organizations guided by the Comrade Commander since his days in Kirin, convey to them his messages and, with their help, carry out political work.

"Gee-up!"

Now and again he raised his whip for no reason except to look behind, and the huge ox with stocky horns darted ahead, its eyes almost bursting in its head. This annoyed Yong Suk, for she wore a long skirt that stopped her from walking fast enough. On top of that, she carried a basket of eggs on her head, with handbills hidden at the bottom. She was the picture of good health, and her youthful face had a high colour.

When given the assignment she was abashed at the idea of playing the part of a young wife, and must have looked bashful throughout the journey of more than 200 *ri*.

They had dropped in at the village of Ungdong where, with

the help of an old couple, they had disguised themselves as a newly-married couple. Yong Suk took off her uniform and put on a yellow jacket and coarse cotton skirt. She was given a strand of braided hair, which she somehow fixed into a bun and then slipped her feet into a pair of straw sandals. What worried her most was her sunburned face, for by this time the police were shrewd enough to spot guerrillas by their attire, the dark bronze faces and their gait. So, before setting out on this trip Yong Suk pulled out her mirror and powdered her face. This was the first time in her life she had done this.

"That'll be enough. If you become too pretty, you'll cause a fuss."

Choe Chil Song, who would look an out-and-out peasant whatever clothes he wore, did not quite understand how Yong Suk was feeling. A single blunder would upset their revolutionary work and might well cost them their lives. Yong Suk was free-and-easy and yet meticulous by nature; she skillfully acted the part of a married woman.

"You've quite a skilful way of making a chignon. You've already learned a lot about it, eh?" Coming out of Ungdong Village, Choe Chil Song teased her, and she blushed in spite of herself.

As the villagers looked at these young strangers on the road, Yong Suk snuggled close to Choe Chil Song, basket on her head, and started a conversation.

"Why are you so serious? Are you thinking of home?"

"He must be crawling about by now."

"Anyway, Hyok Myong is a good name."

They smiled at each other. This looked so natural that the villagers whispered to each other that the young couple was going to the market place early.

While walking along, they chatted about various topics. Suddenly they touched on Se Gol.

"I wonder where he is, what he is doing now."

Choe Chil Song turned round to see Yong Suk who was a pace behind him. She immediately remembered the slender youth with his long neck.

"I'm sure he is bustling about as restless as ever. When I think of Comrade Se Gol I recall what Comrade Cha Gi Yong said the other day."

"What was that?"

"He likened him as a car without a driver."

"Did he really say that? Comrade Cha used to praise him as quite a character, as a carefree and manly chap."

"You may believe me or not. But every action Comrade Se Gol takes is dangerous, I think. He seems to be destined to do the wrong thing...."

"I don't think you appraise people correctly. A man must be like him. Much better than being a dawdler; how broad-shouldered and brisk he is! He has stamina; he is daring and agile, always smiling and is a good mixer who has many friends. Once he makes up his mind, he sees any job through to the finish. What a nice character he has! Do you remember that a few days after he joined the unit he caught so many fish for us? That's the way man should be."

Choe Chil Song did his best to defend Se Gol. And because of this Yong Suk's heart beat quickly in spite of herself. If he had spoken ill of Se Gol, Yong Suk might have got angry. That night after the impressive fishing he had come to her abruptly and given her a hard time, determined to have her gun.

The very existence of Se Gol always made her feel uneasy. She sensed some obstinacy about him, that would drive her into danger. And because of this she could never forget Se Gol even for a moment.

She remembered that night after the battle at Ssoksae Valley. After the gathering which had congratulated Choe Chil Song, Yong Suk had walked alone towards the women guerrillas' shed, delightfully excited by the christening of "Choe Hyok Myong" and the presentation of the "jacket for the baby". Somebody had called her from behind. She turned round to find Se Gol approaching her. He stood close to her, talking about trifles; obviously he had no special business with her.

"He won the battle, got a rifle, and saw his newborn baby and christened him Hyok Myong. Oh, how wonderful, Comrade Yong Suk!"

"If you have anything to say, get it off your chest quickly."

"I've been trying to tell you. Every time you see me, you jump at me like that. Let's sit down here."

Aware that her shed was not far off, Se Gol took her by the shoulders and made her sit down. They sat side by side on a rock. Time passed but he still kept silent. At the first chance she thought it would be better to run away. After a long pause, Se Gol had spoken hesitatingly.

"If you had not helped me join the guerrilla army I would

not have had this pleasure today. And because I practised shooting with your gun, I was able to fight well in today's battle and...."

"Stop talking about that. If you have anything to say, say it."

She knew full well what he had on his mind but she deliberately teased him. As if being involved in a sort of conspiracy, she felt her body burning hot and her face carefully revealing neither anger nor pleasure. Covering her lips with her quivering hands, she lowered her head.

"Why won't you understand me, eh?"

Se Gol's voice shook. Usually bold and daring he was now completely at a loss.

"All right, then. I'll tell you later."

Se Gol rose abruptly and pushed her back. Then she stood motionless, her feet glued to the ground, God knows why. She barely managed to look up and was startled when she met his burning eyes. She turned on her heels and ran down the slope.

"Comrade Yong Suk!" She heard him calling after her but she flew on into the darkness of the forest. She couldn't sleep that night and kept seeing Se Gol's face.

Remembering this, her heart beat faster even now. Whether Choe Chil Song guessed their relationship or not, she did not know, but he kept praising Se Gol as a manly man and a good friend, as a comrade who would become very capable. He added that he would be more successful than anyone else on his current mission.

"Will he really?"

Yong Suk looked at Choe Chil Song, her charming eyes wide open.

"You are strange, Comrade Yong Suk. You speak well of everyone except Comrade Se Gol."

"Why strange?"

Choe Chil Song paused and grinned at Yong Suk.

"See, that's why you are strange."

Her cheeks flushed deeply as she swiftly turned away her head on which she was carrying the basket.

A couple of hours later they reached the bridge leading into the town of Tunhua. Some Japanese soldiers with fixed bayonets were checking everyone entering the town. The long concrete bridge stretched over to the far side of the river,

under which the water flowed down northward. The sleigh glided along the not yet frozen road, sketching a parallel line as it approached the armed soldiers. Yong Suk, dressed as a country woman, her hood covering one side of her forehead, bit her lips in order to calm down her rapidly beating heart.

As the sleigh came to a halt, an angry Japanese voice rang out: "What's that?" It rang over the balustrade of the bridge.

"Firewood, sir."

The smooth, slim birch logs were piled up neatly on the sleigh.

"What's hidden there, I'm asking."

There was another shout, more hostile than the first. Yong Suk put down the basket and mopped the sweat from her face with her handkerchief. The tallest of the three soldiers came up to Yong Suk. At this moment her heart sank.

"What's this?"

"Eggs, sir."

He removed the piece of hemp cloth from the top of the basket with his hairy hand. She had a strong desire to shoot him if only she had had a gun. She must endure it, however.

"What do you have got there at the bottom?"

"Nothing, sir. I spread some stalks of straw so the eggs won't break."

"Don't tell me lies! Hurry up and open it!"

Everything was black before her eyes.

Meanwhile Choe Chil Song was unloading the bundles of firewood. They examined everything closely as though they guessed there were handbills in one of the bundles of firewood and at the bottom of the basket. With an air of indifference, Choe Chil Song rolled up his sleeves and removed the big bundles of wood one by one. His attitude intimated they could check whatever they liked. Controlling her shaky hands Yong Suk began putting the eggs one by one on the wrapping cloth spread on the ground. There was no other way. At that moment Choe Chil Song burst into a fit of anger.

"My God! What a dunderhead the woman is!"

As though electrified, she jerked up her head.

"Don't you know these gentlemen must be thirsty? Why don't you ask them to taste one?"

Frowning, Choe Chil Song spat and swiftly removed the bundle that contained the handbills and put another on it. Meanwhile, Yong Suk picked up an egg and wiped it carefully

with the edge of her skirt. Calming herself, she approached the Japanese, with a shiny egg in both hands.

"Try this, please."

She bowed her head showing the neatly-parted hair and lowered her eyelids.

Seeing this pretty Korean woman kindly offering a fresh egg in both outstretched hands, the Japanese grinned baring his protruding teeth.

"Please take it, sir." Running a sensuous glance over the sloping line of her shoulders, the Japanese stretched out his dark hairy hand. Another egg was wiped with the edge of the skirt, and offered to the slant-eyed Jap.

"Tastee good."

The Japanese with protruding teeth threw the shell over the bridge, wiped his chin with the palm of his hand and looked at the basket with greedy eyes.

This time the basket was passed to the stocky Japanese. There was no need to wipe the egg. One shell after another flew over their shoulders down to the riverbed. Their chins were smeared with the white of egg. Now the yellow hands of all three were thrust into the basket in turn, giving her no time to take the eggs out herself. Yong Suk opened her mouth wide in astonishment and in a desperate voice cried, "Oh, please stop, please don't!" As soon as they finish the eggs, she thought, they will find the handbills at the bottom. At that moment, Choe Chil Song yelled again.

"Oh, that stupid woman. Why don't you be off? Letting them take all the eggs, h'm."

At this Yong Suk quickly turned round hugging the basket.

"No more, sir. I must barter these for rice."

She dodged the Japanese this way and that and then darted to Choe Chil Song.

The soldiers were madly delighted with their plunder and at the thought that they had teased a Korean beauty.

The one with the protruding teeth tossed his head, opening his slobbering mouth.

"He, he, he." The slant-eyed Jap giggled, and his eyes disappeared completely in his face.

The stocky one was still mumbling; he gave out a panting shriek, twisting his stumpy neck. Choe Chil Song stacked the bundles of wood on the sleigh, laughing at the greedy soldiers who would even eat dung if it was offered free.

Meanwhile there was a hubbub among the crowd of people whose passage had been blocked.

"The village woman has been robbed of a basketful of eggs."

"She is lucky not to have suffered anything worse!"

Pulling the sleigh, Choe Chil Song looked back and gave a meaningful smile. But his utterances were just the opposite to what was in his mind.

"You stupid hussy! Why didn't you run away?"

When they were near the market place, Choe Chil Song looked very embarrassed and putting his hand on the back of his neck, he said:

"Forgive me, Comrade Yong Suk. But I had to use words of abuse."

"I didn't know you had it in you, Comrade Choe." Yong Suk grinned, biting her lower lip.

It was not till after sunset that Choe Chil Song was able to meet Comrade Om, who worked as a shoeblack at the market place, and to get in contact with the underground organization. He notified his comrade of the task of throwing the enemy into confusion and decoying the Kwantung Army troops stationed in the town into the mountains, and they decided to scatter the handbills together.

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Next morning the whole town of Tunhua was in a turmoil. Frenzied shouts and yells were heard from the two story brick building and rectangular barracks that housed the Kwantung Army regiment. Stretching his neck up like a viper, the sentry at the gate watched the flurried soldiers coming and going incessantly on horseback or on motorcycles. The garrison area was completely blockaded. By the northern wall, over which the handbills "To Soldiers of the Japanese Army" had flown in, armed men stood guard, goggling with bloodshot eyes. As dusk began to fall, armed soldiers piled into 52 covered trucks and crossed the bridge towards the mountains.

The streets were teeming with police. Merchants and

visitors were forced out to leave the market place. Every spot where people were likely to gather was cleared. Bars, eating houses, the smithy, taverns and even the matchbox shops and the tinker's were closed with order notices on the doors.

Merchants and people who had come to market stood whispering to each other at every corner.

"They say General Kum Song is bringing a large army to attack the town."

"No, people say that a stranger suddenly appeared in the Japanese barracks and informed them that unless they get out today they will be captured."

"The whole town is said to be alive with guerrillas, though there's no way of knowing who they are. Is it true? That gentleman over there could be a guerrilla, couldn't he?"

"The hairtail dealers are coming."

That meant the police were in sight. People immediately began to disperse.

The handbills with the heading "Let Us Korean People Rise Up as One Man to Overthrow Japanese Imperialism!" had been scattered in the streets in front of the market place and in the alleys. The street had been littered with handbills by day-break. The bald-headed owner of the "Pyongyang Noodle House" had picked up two handbills and every now and then went into the storeroom to read them. People from the neighbouring villages gathered up the handbills and hurried off. Villagers from Ungdong, too, who had come to buy salt each took a handbill home, hidden in his cloth belt.

"What a sight it was! The whole place was seething. They say General Kum Song will bring the Korean army and smash them right away. I've heard that the Japanese troops fled from Tunhua by the truckload."

Old Chong with his two missing front teeth made a round of the village to spread the rumour.

"I was told you've got a couple from Chongjin visiting you."

Choe Chil Song came out onto the earthen porch to greet the old man.

"Oh, come in, please. I'm from Chongjin."

"Ah, are you? What a lucky man you are! I've good news for you. I was in Tunhua the day before yesterday. I found the streets covered with white papers. I picked one up. They say it's handbill. They were scattered by our guerrillas. Since last

spring I've been hearing that our army is near the Tuman-gang River, but I never dreamt that it would come all the way up here. The handbill urged the Koreans to rise up and kick out the Japs. I'm not sure, but maybe you'll find such handbills in Chongjin, too...."

Seated on the stepping stone, the old man chatted away, smoked three pipes one after the other.

"What would you do if you were arrested by the Japs for telling me that, Grandpa?" Choe Chil Song asked nonchalantly.

"They won't have time to arrest me. Because our army'll come and beat the hell out of them first."

That night Choe Chil Song addressed the villagers. When he and Yong Suk walked into the room in guerrilla uniforms, the villagers were spellbound. And the most surprised of all was Old Chong.

"By Jove! They say everybody in the streets of Tunhua is a guerrilla whether he's a gentleman in western clothes or a cart-driver. And we already have guerrillas in our village of Ungdong, eh? I thought they were just visitors from Chongjin... ha, ha, ha."

The spacious room was packed to the door.

Yong Suk sat in the kitchen among the women. Standing in the middle, Choe Chil Song made his speech. He took off his cap, bowed and spoke politely.

"We belong to the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army led by General Kum Song. We came here on his orders. Our guerrilla army consists of the sons and daughters of workers and peasants like you. Until last year this woman guerrilla was a kitchen maid at a landlord's house and I was a servant of another landlord.

"We resolved to dedicate our lives to fighting to take back our country from the Japs...."

Choe Chil Song spoke calmly and steadily. He spoke as informally as a young neighbour would do in the living room so that everyone could understand him. In simple words he explained briskly the fundamental problems of the revolution.

"Where should Korea go?" asked he, and gave the answer. He described everything he had seen and heard since he joined the guerrilla army.

"Excuse me, sir, but where is General Kum Song now?"

An elderly woman of 50 or so in a patched padded jacket rose to her feet, holding up her hand.

"The General is in the mountains now, mother."

"In the mountains? You mean he's having a hard time there in this severe winter?"

A wisp of grey hair protruded from her hood, and she seemed on the point of adding something, but gave up her attempt, wiping the corners of her eyes with her sleeve. Choe Chil Song raised both hands clasping them tightly and shouted.

"Villagers, let's rally around General Kum Song firmly, like this. Then we can crush any enemy and win back our country."

He had finished his speech, but the villagers did not disperse and went on chatting until the second cock crowed.

Yong Suk had come into the room just as she had done at Liangkang and Chonsangdegi to explain to the women that they, also, should join the guerrillas and fight with gun in hand. The women who could not do this should help their husbands or sons who were in the guerrillas. This, also, was a big battle to hit the Japanese.

Many young people volunteered for service. Choe Chil Song told them that he could not take them right away but would have a man sent to pick them up as soon as everything was ready. At this moment the elderly woman opened the door and went out.

After parting with the people Choe Chil Song and Yong Suk set out on their journey. They had to move to another place in a hurry. It was still dark when they reached the outskirts of the village. All the villagers came to see them off. The elderly woman, carrying a bundle on her head, swiftly caught up with them and blocked their way.

"Look here, young man. Take this to the General. It is not much but it is a token of my sympathy."

She handed him a string bag with two pairs of straw sandals dangling from it.

"Mother!"

"Please accept this. There is a few *doe* of foxtail millet. When we think of the General having a hard time in the mountains in this cold weather to win back our country, we can't eat or sleep. When you return, young man, I wish you would serve the General a bowl of warm foxtail millet for me. I wish you would. I had a son just like you. He said he was studying at Tunhua and that's what I thought. But last spring the Japs arrested him and hung him on an electricity pole. They said he

was a Communist. You young people remind me of my son. If Chang Sik, my son, was still alive he would have gone to the mountains and armed himself with a rifle just as you did. A few days before his arrest he came home and told me that he would go to General Kum Song and take up arms under him. I did not know what he meant. Now, please accept this. If he is near here I would go to see him but I can't, you know. This string bag was made by my son and he used to bring it with him every time he came home from Tunhua."

She seemed to have something else on the tip of her tongue but would not say it; she turned round and wiped away the tears.

If they had not been in a hurry they would have comforted her with kind words, but they merely said a few words of parting and set out quickly.

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On arriving at Ryongdure Street Se Gol found Chang Du Man's house.

Chang was not at home. He had been arrested a month ago, because he had got drunk and thrown away the signboard of the "Civil Association". Early last spring when the first signboard of "Minsaengdan" was put up he did the same and was detained for a month.

His brother said he did not know where the books were. Pak Gi Nam had said that Chang Du Man had probably buried the books in the ground so that no one could find them. He rummaged in the storeroom and the yard the whole day but could not find them. After pondering over it for a long while he decided to meet the detained man, disguised as a distant relation. After consultations with Chang Du Man's family he visited the police station, but his request was flatly rejected.

Se Gol did not give up, however. He was resilient like a spring; the more resistance he met, the more determined he became. He hid the message for Pak Hung Dok and the money to buy papers and went out into the street. He bought a bottle of wine, drank about half of it, and sprinkled the other half over the front of his coat. With reeling gait he went to Inspector

Choe's residence. It was a large Japanese house with a heavily tarred tin roof overlooking the river. It had double glass windows and a porch, and exquisitely trimmed junipers and a flower bed.

He walked back and forth in the alley. When he saw the inspector in a pair of black-rimmed spectacles getting out of a rickshaw, Se Gol tottered towards his house. In his shabby working clothes, he kicked the front gate open and staggered into the courtyard. "Hey, God damn you! If you are running an inn you must keep the gate open and receive wayfarers. Why have you shut the gate already? It's not dark yet. Man must sleep in a house. You mean I must sleep crouched under the bridge like a dog? Hey, Master! Why don't you let people stay at your inn? What? Money? Here take the money. You think the workers are penniless? It's man who made money, not money that made man. I'll leave you my dirty trousers if my money isn't enough. Come on, give me a room. I must sleep to live. Where is the master, h'm? Aha! He's run away."

Inspector Choe's mistress stretched her overpowdered face out of the window and, turning round, uttered a piercing shriek. The glass sliding door rattled open and a young man staggered forth throwing out his chest. He was the inspector's brother-in-law.

"Hey, what the hell do you think this place is? Get out of here."

"Hum, this is an inn where you make money by letting people sleep."

"What's the matter, you young bastard? Are you out of your mind? Open your eyes and see whose house this is."

The sturdy brother-in-law in riding breeches came out into the porch dragging a pair of Japanese wooden clogs and, grabbing the intruder's arm, pulled him out.

"Good gracious! Why was wine ever invented? Oh, how disgusting! Has the world been turned upside down? Why can't they jail that sort of creature? Tut, tut." The woman—Choe's concubine—in her long skirt, disappeared into the inner room, shaking her well-groomed, greasy hair in dismay.

"What's wrong with wine? Did you stand me wine?"

"Wine is made from grain. If you don't stop acting like that, I'll make your bones rattle. Be off! You think this a butcher's shop?"

Se Gol was dragged out but he freed himself from the young

man's grip and darted forward and banged the porch door with his shoulder. The glass crashed and scattered over the ground. A wild prolonged shriek was heard from inside the house before Inspector Choe came out in his *kimono* bouncing along the hallway. His spectacles flashed and his metallic voice rang through the courtyard.

"God damn him! Beat that crazy bastard to pulp and throw him into the gutter."

Picking up a fencing stick on the porch Inspector Choe came out into the yard.

"We really are unlucky this year, and now we have this disgusting intruder."

He stuck out his belly, tossed his head and stretched out the fencing stick. His mistress, standing by his side, took it and handed it over to the young man in riding breeches, frowning.

"When he was at Yungping, your father was raided by a drunkard who used to work for him as a servant, and a few months later met a tragic death, you see?"

"Shut your mouth. That makes me really angry. Oh, hell, you hurt me. All the women are.... Father and brother didn't die because of wine but because of the Communists. The battle is on between the Communists and Greater Japan, tenants and landlords, and between the oppressed and those with power."

Having taken the fencing stick, the brother-in-law wielded it, yelling at the top of his voice. He beat the intruder about the head and legs. Se Gol staggered intentionally, dodging every blow.

"My, you are a foxy fox, um."

Angered, the brother-in-law pulled on a pair of canvas shoes, rolled up his sleeves and took a leap at Se Gol.

"I'll half kill you. Maybe you mightn't know the taste of beating."

"You beat me? Why? You crazy dog?! Don't you know the law? I say I'll pay and sleep here. You beat people at the inn?"

The brother-in-law lifted up the fencing stick and brought it down on Se Gol's head. But Se Gol moved fast and the stick hit his shoulder and then the outdoor lamp. The cream-coloured shade was smashed to smithereens, the pieces showering everything around.

"That bastard! Hey, bring me the shotgun!"

The word shotgun electrified Se Gol; he pretended he

could not move freely, and twisting his legs, collapsed, knocking his head against the wall. On the instant, Inspector Choe darted over to him and stamped on his back.

"You're hitting me, eh? You dogs."

"Tie him up!"

Inspector Choe ran to the porch and grabbed the telephone on the wall. Ting-ting went the bell, and he shouted into the mouthpiece. Then came a yell "Hurry up!"

The inspector brought a rope. After a few moments of faked resistance, Se Gol's arms were tied.

Soon there was the sound of a bicycle arriving, and through the front gate came a policeman rattling his sabre.

"Take this man and jail him. Teach him how to behave. If you are drunk you should have gone to bed, you dog. You can charge him with anything you like: disturbing the peace, trespassing, obstructing the police in the performance of their duty, infringement on human rights, attempted theft, violence and so on. Take him away."

"H'm, so many charges they have against me," Se Gol said to himself, hardly able to suppress a burst of laughter.

At the police station, Se Gol was put through all the usual formalities for this sort of case.

The jail was large. Three days later he spotted Chang Du Man. He tried hard to win Chang's confidence. On the fifth day he received a slip of paper written "September Maple".

That night an extraordinary incident took place. It was reported that a master "political criminal" named Song Pil had made his escape. Song, one of the top leaders of the "Committee to Prepare the Rebuilding of the Party", had escaped while being escorted to prison. In the dead of the night ear-splitting gunshots rang out all over the town. Motorcycles threaded their way through the streets and armed police searched every corner of the town. A large number of policemen were also rushed to the mountains.

Next day Se Gol was released; he had been warned that if he committed a similar offence he would be given ten years' penal servitude. On every bulletin board a newspaper was pasted, showing the picture of a Communist named Song Pil, along with a news report on his escape under a headline: "A Top Communist Leader Escapes While Being Escorted. The Mountains Are Being Searched." The news report was framed with a dark bold line to make it conspicuous. He was being

taken to the prison in a covered car when three masked strangers with guns appeared, shot the two escorting policemen and disappeared.

In every street and alley the civil and military police looked at every pedestrian with watchful eyes. Se Gol did not care, however. He made his roundabout way to the riverside. "I've done it!"

He had an urge to give a shout of joy. He went straight to Chang Du Man's house. Handing the slip of paper to his brother, he suggested digging up the ground under the maple tree. There was a short maple tree at one corner of the yard, under which a jar had been buried.

He found scores of volumes of communist literature in the musty jar. Among them were the *Experiences of Guerrilla Warfare* and the *Soviet Constitution* which Pak Gi Nam wanted to have.

He left as the sun hung over the mountains in the west. Instead of going straight to Lohsing, he decided to call at Yungping and take the mountain path. This was because after such a success without a hitch, he might have a spot of trouble. At first he thought to take a quiet bystreet, but he was afraid it might be dangerous, so deliberately chose the busy street in front of the railway station. He walked along the shopping street where the advertisement boards of *Jintan*, *Rhoto Eye Lotion*, *Chujo-to*, "Youth Barber's Shop", "Bar Drink & Drink Again", "Pawn Shop" and "OK Record" stood close together.

He went into a second-hand bookshop to buy newspapers and magazines, such as the *Donga Ilbo*, *Choson Ilbo*, *Maeil Sinmun* as well as the *Chuo Koron*, *Keizai* and any others he could lay his hands on. He sat in a corner of the shop and tore off the covers of the magazines in the presence of other customers, saying that he was going to use these as wallpaper. Having wrapped them in a bundle he went into a stationer's. He wanted to buy some presents for his friends. Since he had only a little money left, he decided to buy about ten notebooks. Suddenly he thought of Yong Suk. Her oval face with double eyelids flashed across the glass-covered stand where various notebooks, textbooks, abacuses, black ink and writing brushes were on the display. He rubbed his chin, removing the bundle from one hand to the other though it was not at all heavy. He felt his cheeks flush and a little ashamed that he had thought of Yong Suk instead of Choe Chil Song. He gave up the idea of buying

her a small mirror. He looked at one thing after the other, bought a pocket notebook which was a bit thick and which was beautifully covered though rather small. This seemed suitable for a song-book. He opened the bundle and wrapped the pocket notebook separately and thrust it into the newspapers.

By the time he had finished shopping the sun had set behind the western mountains. He walked in a hurry to get to the end of this street. On his way to the railway station, near the hill, were the Japanese army barracks. He wanted to take a good look at them as he went by, so he set out in that direction. Just then its hoofs clattering on the pavement, a tall horse approached, bearing a high-ranking stiff-necked Japanese police officer in a gorgeous uniform, his grey cape fluttering in the breeze. He was followed by a Japanese woman mounted on a smaller horse of local breed. She wore a blanket as a cloak, sat bent forward, a trunk fastened to each side.

The man leading the horse by the reins resembled Pak Hung Dok. The way he walked with his feet apart and one of his shoulders leaning a trifle to one side made the resemblance striking. It was very pleasant to be reminded of one of your best friends even by seeing someone rather like him. Se Gol kept on walking, looking at the horse driver. It was Pak Hung Dok, no doubt about it, walking leisurely in this direction, in a shabby soft hat and black overall.

"Why, that's Pak Hung Dok! How come he has shown up here of all places?" Hoping that it would not be Pak Hung Dok, Se Gol paused and waited for the horses to pass. On the instant he saw Pak grinning. Obviously he also recognized him.

"Hey, watch your step! Walk carefully, man. What'll happen to you if you get in the way of the horses?"

As usual, Pak Hung Dok was quick-witted. Se Gol was at a loss what to do. After some hesitation he bent his head.

"Excuse me. Could you tell me." Se Gol was as bold as his pal.

"Is this the way to get the train to Lohsing?"

"It is."

Pak Hung Dok's grin and wink were full of meaning. The horses turned into the compound of an imposing building surrounded by a high brick wall topped by an electric wire.

The curtain fell over the brief scene.

"Incredible. Fancy meeting him here of all places!" He wondered. He smoked a cigarette crouched under a willow tree

a little off the main street. However imperative it was to have good cover, it was impossible surely that Pak Hung Dok had become a horse driver for a Japanese wife. His grin and wink had dispelled his suspicion, yet he did not feel happy for some reason. Seated on the roadside, Se Gol brooded over whether he should meet Pak Hung Dok here or meet him at Lohsing as arranged. To avoid making a blunder he decided to go to Yung-ping and then on to Lohsing. Hurriedly he left the main street behind.

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As the police chief had instructed, Pak Hung Dok took his wife to a high-class hotel facing the railway station, and immediately ran out into the street. First he drove the horse but this hampered his movement, so he left the horse in the corner of the courtyard at the inn and searched the street. Up and down he went, passing the railway station two or three times with eyes strained, but he failed to spot Se Gol. Because of Song Pil's escape, he could not walk in the streets freely so he went to the station to check the timetable of the trains. Trains went to Kirin and Harbin and came from Hamhung and Chong-jin. Even after the last train had left, Se Gol did not appear. Day was breaking when he got back to the inn, tired out.

One and a half months ago, Pak Hung Dok had become an office boy for Yamanashi, the chief of the Lohsing police station. First he had promised Cha Gi Yong that in order to set up a semi-guerrilla district, he would settle down at Lohsing as a servant for a landlord. For Pak Hung Dok being a servant was such a hateful job that even the word made him sick. For ten years he had been horribly ill-treated and forced into painful drudgery. However, after hearing that the Comrade Commander had disguised himself as a servant to work underground, he had regarded the job a great honour. It would be good camouflage, he thought. Once he put on shabby clothes, he would pass; he need hardly put on an awkward air.

Fortunately, three days after his arrival at Lohsing he was hired by Landlord Yang, alias, Prissy. Yang owned more than half of the huge plain of Lohsing, and had recently dismissed

three of his five hands. One because he was ill, the other two because they had been blacklisted by the police as suspicious. Pak Hung Dok posed as a day labourer; a robust and vigorous youth, he could carry twice as much firewood as others, and worked from dawn till late at night, doing any kind of job without a grumble. Pak Hung Dok was so crafty that he made it appear as if he had been taken in by Yang, and settled in his house, doing a backbreaking work load every day. Early in the morning he swept the yard, cleaned the animal shed, fetched water and then joined the others in farming. He chopped firewood, cut fodder and did all sorts of work late into the night. He did any work so dexterously that Yang was perfectly satisfied with him.

"Yes, my Pak Hung Dok is a man of rare ability."

After ten days or so Yang started boasting to his neighbours about his new man and made a generous promise that he would buy him a new suit of clothes in a few months.

Pak Hung Dok's plan went smoothly like a sail before the wind. First of all, he could educate the servants every day. They were upright men in the neighbourhood of 30. Two of them had families and lived right near the landlord, the other two were still unmarried, both a little over 30. All of them were illiterate; so every night he taught them how to write, covering the window so that the lamplight did not stream out. Pak Hung Dok taught them about the landlords' class discrimination and contempt for their bondslaves and showed them how harshly they were worked and exploited. When they finished the day's work and lay down in bed, Pak Hung Dok told his colleagues in undertones the story of the guerrillas, which he said he had as hearsay, and about General Kum Song. Every time he referred to the General's activity, the others sat on their beds, listened reverently and felt as if they were seeing the sun's rays in the pitch dark room.

His being able to stay at Yang's was advantageous for him in every respect. As Yang owned a big stretch of land, he called his tenants to his house almost every other day, and in the autumn they visited him more frequently. Days and nights Yang's angry yells at them would resound throughout the main hall. It was Pak Hung Dok's job to win them over to his side. As the days went by, Yang's house became a sort of headquarters of revolutionary organization. On the surface Yang the landlord did the shouting, but in practice Pak Hung Dok con-

trolled everything. He could read the people's minds and the enemy's movements 40 to 50 *ri* around, like the palm of his hand. The tenants who brought secret messages to Pak bobbed their heads to the arrogant, grumbling landlord. Then Pak Hung Dok made another trick to take a step further into the enemy's den.

One day Yang was going to get his hair cut. Although the barber's shop was only ten minutes' walk from his house, he had been very reluctant to go there these days.

"Master, shall I shave you?"

Pak Hung Dok grinned, rubbing his chin.

"You know how to shave?"

The landlord in grey serge *turumagi* with a walking stick in his hand raised one of his eyebrows.

"Yes, sir. In my village there was no barber; so I used to do the job."

"Really? You are quite dexterous anyhow."

"Won't you try me out?"

"Well, have you got the tools?"

Only a few days ago Pak Hung Dok had realized why Yang dreaded going to the barber's. The other day Choe Sung Won, a landlord in the next village, had been killed in a barber's shop. His throat had been cut by a razor and he died in the chair, writhing. It was said later that the barber had avenged his father's murder on the landlord who had beaten him for failing to pay his debts and he had died of his wounds. Yang was never sure that he might not meet the same fate, for he knew full well that he had been no less cruel than his murdered colleague. However, he could not stop his hair from growing. So he still had to get his hair cut once a month, though he shaved himself at home with clumsy hands. He was so frightened at the murder that as his hair grew, he suffered nightmare every night.

Yang stood the stick on the veranda and lit a cigarette.

"You mean you really can cut my hair?"

"Forget it. I just used to do it for the villagers. How can I cut the hair of a gentleman like you?"

Pak Hung Dok's words had a touch of irony.

"Oh, don't be so sulky, Hung Dok. Everybody has hair, whether he be a gentleman or not. You just try."

So Pak Hung Dok brought the velvet-cushioned green revolving chair into the glass-windowed parlour, for the master to sit on. Yang was generous enough to have the big mirror

brought in from the living room, made a chin-cloth with a piece of brand-new cotton material and also had him buy hair-clip-pers, a razor, combs, brushes, and so on.

With the utmost care Pak Hung Dok clipped the master's thinning, half-grey hair, devoting much time to it.

"This head of mine is a bit abnormal. There is not much hair on the crown but the chin is too hairy." Yang complained, betraying his anxiety as Pak Hung Dok was about to moisten his neck to shave. True, his head should have been upside down. He was getting bald but his chin had a thick beard. Pak Hung Dok dipped a towel into the hot water, wrapped it round the master's chin to soften the coarse beard before starting to shave. When he stropped the razor on the leather belt and brought it to his neck, Yang raised his eyes and glared at the barber.

"Please shut your eyes. When you look at me, I can't shave you, my hands tremble."

"Do a good job, boy."

Yang's quivering voice sounded like a groan. They were landlord and servant, but however strong Pak Hung Dok's urge to hurt this exploiter, he had to suppress it with a smile.

"Hey, Hung Dok. You are quite a handy man, you know."

Yang was overjoyed when he looked at his fat face in the mirror. A few days later he entertained Yamanashi, chief of the police station of the town, to a drinking bout and boasted of his "private barber shop". This deeply interested the chief who knew Choe's tragic end better than anyone else. He had his hair cut a couple of times at Yang's parlour and then, bluntly asked the landlord to hand Pak Hung Dok to him because he wanted to hire him as his office boy. At first Yang refused, but finally he regretfully agreed so long as Pak Hung Dok continued to cut his hair. Pak Hung Dok struck his lap with his hands. They had been nicely trapped. He had been planning to form an Anti-Imperialist League, and go deep into the enemy's lair to get a firm grip on him. Now here he was doing his work energetically under the very nose of the enemy. Day in and day out he hustled about the streets of Lohsing on the rattling old police bicycle that had been repaired. With one trouser-leg rolled up to the knee, he visited everywhere; drinking houses, clothing shops and village heads for many miles around. The organizations of the Anti-Imperialist League, Youth Association, and the Women's Association seeped to the

bottom of Japanese imperialist rule, like oil gradually soaking a piece of cloth. Meanwhile, he had to serve three or four persons in his barber shop every day. He decoyed policemen and obtained any information he wanted. The section and subsection chiefs were vigilant and too overbearing. He could not cope with them, but the deputy station chiefs and other high-ranking officers were as soft as putty in his hands.

Before long dignitaries at Lohsing flocked to the duty officer's room next to the bathhouse behind the police station, among them Police Force Commander Adachi who was proud of his moustache and Lt. Col. Sugino from the local detachment of the Kwantung Army. Sometimes, the chief of the Tungning police station dropped in at the barber's shop when, passing by on horseback, he would stay here for the day.

After several days and nights of work Pak Hung Dok had the shop arranged neatly, with a wooden floor and walls and ceiling papered.

Police Force Commander Adachi came into the hallway, holding up his long head like a sponge gourd and rattling his spurs. Pak Hung Dok quickly opened the door and made such a deep bow that his head almost touched his knees. The tipsy commander whose beard was as black as a shoe brush, examined the barber from top to bottom for several moments before sitting on the chair.

"You are as hairy as me, sir."

"Um? What?"

He could not understand Korean, so Pak Hung Dok gestulated to imply what he meant. Adachi only understood such Korean words as "Communist" and the names of some nearby places like Laoheishan or Tungning. He took a long time to shave the Japanese, stropping the razor several times.

With the movements of his hands and body Pak Hung Dok asked him why his beard had grown so heavy. He replied that there were so many Communists in the mountains and he had been too busy to shave, because he had to hunt them. Pak Hung Dok inquired where the Communists were and the Japanese officer said that the ranges of Mt. Paekdu-san were teeming with communist troops. Then Pak asked him if he had seen them with his own eyes. He replied that he had not but heard by telephone, pointing to his ear with his finger, grinning. Pak Hung Dok advised him not to grin, touching his cheek with his finger tip. As soon as he indicated that if he laughed the razor

might cut his neck, the officer was petrified, his face turning white with horror.

In this way Pak Hung Dok acquainted himself with the enemy's situation and built up revolutionary organizations. As instructed by the Comrade Commander, Pak Hung Dok put out his net and made preparations to catch big fish. In an effort to rally all sections of people he brought in everyone opposed to Japanese imperialism, be he a street vendor, inn proprietor or wine dealer. He was most worried about the possibility of spies worming their way into the revolutionary ranks, but this problem was easily solved through Hayashi, chief of the inspection section. If anyone was suspected as a spy Pak Hung Dok would curse him as a bad fellow and on the instant Hayashi would change colour.

After his employment at the police station Pak Hung Dok put two reliable peasants in charge of activities in farming villages, so that he could concentrate on probing the movements of the army and police and send messages to the communications centres. His work went ahead briskly. But he had one headache—it was what was to be done next and how. He was also anxious to get news from the guerrillas. He had the idea of picking out strong youths and sending them to his units, but he had received no instructions about this. And he had eliminated malignant landlords or agents meticulously but he was afraid that as time went by he might well be exposed. He was thinking of sending a messenger to Yungping, when Yamanashi suddenly asked him to accompany him on a journey. He asked him to take his wife to Ryongdure Street on her way back to Japan. A man of strange whims, the Japanese insisted that a motoring journey would cause her to have a miscarriage, and forced him to drive the horse.

Pak Hung Dok could not find Se Gol and the next day he left with a helpless feeling for Lohsing, driving the horse.

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Pak Gi Nam and Li Chol Gun were seated at a table across from Song Pil near the door.

Song Pil had just finished his explanation as to how he

had escaped from the police and how he had been able to come to this base in safety with the help of the revolutionary organization. His round, darkish face was unshaved. There was something gloomy about his eyes, and he looked utterly exhausted. Now over 30, Song Pil was a serious-looking man, speaking and hearing every word with the utmost care. He had worked his way through school in Seoul. In 1926 he left school and came to Chientao where he soon affiliated himself with the "General Bureau in Manchuria". He had somehow managed to evade the wholesale arrests. Then, last winter, he had been arrested but was released on bail for lack of evidence. However, he was rearrested last September. There had been much fuss about the "movement to rebuild the Party", but he was sorry to say that he had not done anything worth mentioning.

Pak Gi Nam did not know much about Song Pil. A few years ago before committed to West Gate Prison he had heard a rumour that there was a certain Song near Yenching. However, he treated the man who had made a bold escape kindly.

"Your case could be called a hair's-breadth escape. Well, have a good rest today before you start work."

Pak Gi Nam glanced at Li Chol Gun, seeking his agreement. A taciturn youth, Li Chol Gun nodded his agreement. Then he asked Song Pil where the "three armed strangers" were. Song Pil replied that they were old friends of his but they had all scattered and he had not met them again. Li Chol Gun tilted his head and nodded, saying it was quite possible; he asked no further questions. Song Pil gave a big sigh, his eyes filled with tears. To Pak Gi Nam this seemed quite natural. It was not an easy task to get away from the enemy; Song Pil had hidden himself in the water a whole day and had not eaten anything for two days. His feet swollen, he had somehow made it to the base. He might well heave a long sigh of relief.

"In the grim days of the revolution everyone must risk his life. We Communists, in particular, must put our lives on stake at every step, in order to defend our principles."

Pak Gi Nam addressed these words to no one in particular, rolling a newspaper cigarette. But Pak had achieved the effect he intended. Song Pil raised an eyebrow and stole a look at Li Chol Gun.

"I think mine is a peculiar case. I've done nothing special but I feel awfully tired."

"If your fatigue is physical, not mental, it won't be hard to endure. Now, then, go ahead and take a rest."

"That's all right. I'm feeling quite rested now, as we sit here together like this."

At that moment there was the sound of footsteps by the door and in came a guerrilla. Raising his hand smartly to salute, he reported to Li Chol Gun. He said that two National Salvation Army soldiers had arrived in Hwangga Village to buy rice but were arrested because they would not pay the price and had attempted to flee.

"Did you arrest them?" asked Li Chol Gun in a gruff voice.

"No. They were arrested by the Red Guards and brought to the company."

"Well done. We must be merciless in suppressing those who harm us."

Pak Gi Nam chipped in, springing to his feet. Li Chol Gun followed suit and approached the guerrilla, asking.

"Then did you find out all about it? You know whether they came to buy provisions or whether they just wanted to get them free because of the food shortage? They must know our established order since they are within our zone...."

"That we did not find out."

The young guerrilla grinned, raising his hand to the nape of his neck.

"What's the use of finding out? It's obvious. It's plunder. And they laugh at us. This is more serious."

Pak Gi Nam protested angrily, his face colouring.

"Comrade Pak, you...."

Raising his bushy eyebrows, Li Chol Gun indicated that Pak was embarrassing him in the presence of Song Pil. Pak Gi Nam must have read his expression but he took up a more recalcitrant attitude to justify himself. Li Chol Gun was compelled to add.

"We mustn't be hostile to them. Go back, Comrade Han. I'll be with you right away."

Saluting, the guerrilla left.

"Taking hostile attitudes towards them is not our policy. This is what our enemy wants. Surely you know that, Comrade Pak? Don't just see their negative features; we must also see their positive features. And we must see the Anti-Japanese National Salvation Army as a whole; the negative features of its individual soldiers must not be our criterion in assessing the

whole army. We mustn't shun them, we must help them. We should patiently exert our revolutionary influence on them. They are an armed force opposed to Japanese imperialism. If we don't understand their position and merely cold-shoulder them, where would they go? Isn't it obvious? Suppose they did take some of our provisions. And let's suppose that some narrow-minded people were annoyed. Still we can't dispose of matters recklessly, driven by a passing anger, deviating from the principle of an anti-imperialist united front. It's obvious they are short of provisions. We'll have to find out."

As Li Chol Gun finished speaking, Pak Gi Nam turned round, his face flushing.

"The National Salvation Army has taken anti-communist stand and is antagonistic towards us. Can we say that this negative tendency is confined to individual soldiers?"

"Of course, it isn't individual; it's a general trend. Therefore, we must educate and influence them. That's what I mean."

"Basically, they are an armed force that represents the interests of the national bourgeoisie. The remnants of them. I hope you'll bear that in mind. While they harass our revolutionary masses, we can't join hands with them, can we? Must we form a united front with them, while they slap us in the face? That's not a united front. I think we should punish these fellows severely. Leave everything to me. I'll teach those marauders how to behave properly."

"Comrade Pak!"

Li Chol Gun cried, stepping forward to his comrade. He looked very serious, indeed.

At that moment there was a knock at the door.

"Who's there?"

The door creaked open and to their surprise Se Gol entered. Pak Gi Nam who had been in low spirits ran up to the visitor with a shout of delight.

"Oh, you've come!"

Pak pumped his hand in an ecstasy of joy. Then Li Chol Gun shook hands. His excitement had not yet subsided, and an awkward smile lit up his reddened face.

"Well, excuse me."

Song Pil rose to his feet and left. For a moment Se Gol thought that the stranger closely resembled that man in the picture on the bulletin boards he had seen at Ryongdure Street.

Se Gol rummaged his bundle, produced the musty-smelling *Soviet Constitution* and put it on the table.

"Many thanks, many thanks."

Pak Gi Nam was as delighted as a child and paced round and round the room, holding the thin booklet in both hands.

"Comrade Li Chol Gun, how about setting up a Soviet in this revolutionary district? Needless to say, we can't establish a Commune here. Then what do we need? It's a Soviet we need."

"A Soviet?"

Pak Gi Nam had talked a lot about this Soviet. However, Li Chol Gun had not given any answer. He had never felt the need for setting up that sort of thing, and he had had no idea how to apply this form to this part of the country.

Pak Gi Nam talked on tediously about the Soviet, whether the other agreed or not. Then he asked Se Gol about the book he had recommended. With a mischievous smile, Se Gol fumbled in the bundle and took out a booklet for Pak Gi Nam to see.

"The *Experiences of Guerrilla Warfare*. Yes, this is it. This is the one I told you about."

Getting up from his seat, Pak Gi Nam leafed through the book and nodded.

"This is a success. This will get a favourable reception back at the unit. By the way, was Chang Du Man at home?"

"Well, I just got it."

Se Gol equivocated because it would take him a long time to explain what had happened.

"You've got great skill, Comrade Se Gol. How can I repay your favour?"

"Well, you may do later."

Feeling rather contented Se Gol watched Pak Gi Nam again pick up the booklet and walk round the room, imagining Chon Gwang Sik behaving in exactly the same manner.

The next day Se Gol left for Lohsing where Pak Hung Dok was, steadily trekking along the mountain range leading to the town.

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After leaving Ungdong Village Choe Chil Song and Yong

Suk found themselves in a tight corner, with a long way still to go before reaching their destination.

Now hollow-eyed, Choe Chil Song, covered with a white camouflage cloth, watched ahead, crouching on the snow. There were enemy troops everywhere. The snow-covered mountains and fields were infested with Kwantung Army troops rushed out from Tunhua. They virtually covered every inch of ground—the crests of mountains, valleys and the riversides. They had cut off highways and mountain paths, checked every passer-by, and shot several people at the roadside each day.

“Our decoy tactics have brought a lot of them up here. But how can we thread through?”

His heart was leaping, but he said it calmly to show Yong Suk he was not worried. Yong Suk, camouflaged in the same way, was crouching down a pace or two behind him. She could sense the anxiety in his words.

Ensnconced in the forest the enemy felled trees and lit fires. Shortly the sun would set and preparations seemed to be afoot to pitch camps. Furious cries were heard from every direction and occasionally the two heard the clatter of machine guns, a warning intended for our forces. Choe Chil Song and Yong Suk were forced to lie on their stomachs in a hollow and wait for dark. Their feet were frozen and their bodies were numb with cold but they dared not move.

Presently darkness descended on the forest. Choe Chil Song pulled the rope bag out of the snow, slung it on his shoulder and threw a handful of snow at Yong Suk behind him. This was a signal to move forward. They had to pierce this enemy-infested area before daybreak.

Choe Chil Song crawled out of the hollow and clung close to a fallen tree. He was immediately followed by Yong Suk, the skirts of her camouflage cloth fluttering. They moved across the mountainside this way for scores of metres until they realized that they would no longer be able to go on like this. The campfires built here and there lit up the forest like broad daylight, and the dark places the light did not reach, were heavily guarded by armed soldiers. Chained dogs howled furiously, as if to snap at them at any moment.

They had to crawl through the snow. Choe Chil Song inched his way along, flat on his stomach, holding his rope bag in his left hand and a rifle in his right. For a couple of hours, they moved ahead like this, but were still among the enemy troops. Their

limbs were completely numb. When the wind blew, it half buried them in snowdrifts and the fine snow trickled down their necks. Choe Chil Song stopped a moment for Yong Suk to catch up.

"Cheer up, Comrade Yong Suk. We have to get out of here before dawn."

"Don't worry about me."

They looked at each other, trying hard to hide their despair.

As the eastern sky was paling, danger came all of a sudden. A dog barked several times, and then there was the sound of footsteps. An electric torch flashed somewhere near. The heavy snowstorm buried their traces instantly, but they would not be able to deceive the dogs. Choe Chil Song's hair stood on end and he asked Yong Suk to run down a rise ahead of him. But she shook her head.

"We go together. I won't go alone."

"Come on!"

"No."

However, there must not be a moment's delay. Now, he had to get up. He picked up a stone and threw it down the mountain side, at the same time darting up towards the crest of the mountain. There followed a noisy clatter of guns. If it had not been for the rope bag he could have moved more freely but he could not throw it away. When he reached the top of the precipice, a bullet whined past his ear. He could hear the dogs barking and the soldiers shouting. Choe Chil Song jumped down the precipice. Below it was a brook. He ran along the brook which was not frozen because the water flowed too fast.

When day broke he covered his footsteps and hid in the crevice of a rock. That night he went along the brook to the point where he was to meet Yong Suk, but she was nowhere to be seen. He walked up and down the brook until almost dawn, hoping to find the girl. Since she knew the dogs were chasing her, she also must have flung herself into the water. In the morning he finally found her lying unconscious in the crevice of a rock.

"Comrade Yong Suk!"

They embraced each other, speechless for a while.

Four days later they reached the first point where they should have met their unit, but the unit had left. They went into the forest to get to the second point of meeting but strayed off course and had to wander about the forest. They guessed their direction and went southeast for three days. They thought that

if they had taken the right course, they would find traces of the unit, even though they might not meet them. They walked on and on but only the snow, the forests and fallen trees awaited them. To make it still worse, a fierce blizzard howled and blurred their way. Out of provisions now, they had not eaten for two days but they were not crestfallen, anticipating a meeting with the unit before long. However, on the third day Yong Suk asked with tears in her voice.

"What will we do if we don't find our unit?"

Choe Chil Song had not lost his tenacity though he had kept his mouth shut tightly.

"Wait a day or two, then we'll see."

Choe Chil Song's blunt reply had a note of reproach in it. This hurt her feelings and she went ahead, the colour suffusing her cheeks.

Another day passed. Both of them were dead tired and had not the strength to keep walking. Gradually Choe Chil Song's eyes betrayed anxiety. Yong Suk would shed tears unnoticed and mop her eyes with her sleeves.

Crouching by a rock Choe Chil Song lit a fire. He used one of the three match sticks which had been kept in his bosom, wrapped in two sheets of paper and an oil paper and then a piece of cloth. He wrapped up the remaining two match sticks and put the packet back in his bosom. Yong Suk's eyes rested on the scene and then wandered about the ominously bleak sky dyed in the evening glow. She wished they didn't have to use the matches any more.... However, she only found before her eyes the desolate, wind-swept sky, range after range of mountains and monstrous forests. Yet, Choe Chil Song's countenance was as unaffected as ever. His frozen face that was a trifle swollen had turned darkish red. He looked calmer than usual and his expression seemed to say that he had foreseen all this. With composure he gathered dead branches and built a fire. Then he untied the mess tin from his rucksack slowly, put a handful of snow in it and washed it neatly.

Yong Suk was sorry to see Choe Chil Song doing this. What was he thinking about? She wished they could open their hearts and share each other's worries. But he was a reticent man. As soon as they had lost their way in the forest, he did everything by himself silently, as though he had forgotten how to speak.

Unknowingly, Yong Suk heaved a sigh and opened her

rucksack by the fire. She heated some snow in the mess tin, put in a pinch of salt, stirred the water and drank it. Neither of them knew whether this was effective, but they both fell asleep as soon as they were warm by the fireside.

Next day. The ominous presentiment she had felt seemed justified. Choe Chil Song's unconcerned expression was definitely not a good sign. Since he was of large build, his energy was sagging rapidly. He became very frustrated; he could no longer move freely. From now she had to take care of him herself.

"I think we'd better make a sleigh to carry our loads." Yong Suk suggested it out of sheer anxiety, but Choe Chil Song just stared at her with hollow, abstract eyes. She put the rucksacks on the sleigh made of boughs and pulled it. Night came and they sheltered in the crevice of a rock. A fire was lit with the last match but one.

"We don't have a little roast rice flour, do we, Comrade Yong Suk?" Moistening his dark parched lips with the tip of his tongue, Choe Chil Song asked the futile question.

Yong Suk answered "No." in a quivering voice, glancing at the bulging rope bag.

"Then we'll again...."

Choe Chil Song fumbled in his rucksack and pulled out a small packet of salt. With shaking hands Yong Suk poured boiling water into a cup and handed it to him. Seated with the cup in his hand Choe Chil Song stared vacantly at her, and she sat biting her lower lip apparently to suppress something surging up in her chest. Yong Suk's heart was further rent asunder as she watched the man so unaffected by this calamity. Both knew that everything would be over in a day or two, though neither would say a word. Lying on his side by the fire, Choe Chil Song told her about the day he had been making straw sandals on the rock in Spring Valley; he was trying to ease the cold, hunger and fatigue somehow by telling this story. For her part Yong Suk, her eyes sunken and her lips dry, cheered herself by talking about Mother Kang Ban Sok. She had worn a white dress, and had visited the guerrillas gathered in the inner village. Yong Suk had stood at the end of the last line of the guerrillas. Through her tears Mother Kang Ban Sok had spoken to the guerrillas.

"You know why I'm crying, young people? I'm crying because today I'm happy. Many mothers cry all their lives...."

Now Yong Suk shed tears, interrupting her story. The clear apples of her eyes moved aimlessly for a while before they were blurred by large tears, which coursed down her full cheeks, gathered under the chin and dripped onto the back of her hand. Seeing this Choe Chil Song looked away.

"My mother died when I was three years old, so I don't remember her face. So to me, Mother Kang Ban Sok was like my own mother."

Choe Chil Song heard Yong Suk's voice as from a long way off.

Presently he took out his pocket notebook, put it on his lap and scribbled on it with a thick pencil stump. Then he tore the page off the notebook and thrust it into the strap of the rope bag. Yong Suk did not know what he was doing; she lowered her wet eyelashes, and hugging her rucksack, hung her head.

"How about singing a song, Yong Suk? Now cheer up."

Before she replied, Choe Chil Song, looking up at the blue sky through the swaying tops of the larch trees, sang in a low, husky voice.

*Exploited and oppressed proletarians.
Come and fight the revolutionary war....*

Yong Suk lifted her head and rubbed her wet eyes. Her closed lips opened and a song flowed out. They sang on and on. When it got dark they went on singing with their eyes shut. Choe Chil Song closed his eyes gently as though he was asleep, barely conscious of what he was doing. With his eyes closed he saw a vivid picture of the Comrade Commander guiding his hand to help him write his name. Then he saw him taking up and scrutinizing Choe's hands that had been twisting the straw rope. Then again he had a clear vision of his wife's tear-filled eyes; she was showing him the bear's gall and asking him to do a good job. He started and opened his eyes. The red charcoal fire was burning and by the fire Yong Suk sat singing in an almost inaudible voice. Choe Chil Song placed the rope bag in front of him and put his head on it.

As night fell, they stopped their singing. The fire had burned low. Sitting across the dead fire from each other, their backs against the rocks, holding their rucksacks in their arms, they fell asleep. The wind blew snow over their faces and backs. Their feet were buried, then their knees. As the time moved on,

they no longer felt cold or hungry; their temperatures had been slowly going down but they remained seated.

It was midday when Chon Gwang Sik and his party found Choe Chil Song and his comrade.

"Comrade Choe!"

"Yong Suk!"

Yong Taek and Sang Son ran up to them, shouting. On the Comrade Commander's orders they had been sent out to look for them, and they only found them after searching the mountains for two days. The two unconscious guerrillas had almost frozen to death. Only their barely visible breathing revealed that they were still alive. The rescue party built a fire and cooked rice flour in water. Chon Gwang Sik pulled Choe Chil Song out of the snowdrift, carried him to the fireside and shook him, calling him repeatedly. Choe Chil Song slowly opened his sunken eyes. He could not take in who they were; they looked like his guerrilla friends.

"Comrade Choe! The Comrade Commander sent us out to look for you. Comrade Choe!"

Choe Chil Song nodded in understanding and closed his eyes again. Yong Suk had a clearer consciousness than Choe Chil Song.

The party felled trees and made stretchers to carry them. After a day and a night they arrived back at their camp and headquarters. The Comrade Commander had received a message and came out some 10 *ri* to meet them.

Choe Chil Song and Yong Suk were laid down in a shed where Myong Ok, Hye Yong and Ok Nyo looked after them. They boiled water, washed their limbs and made thin porridge for them. Gradually their breathing became regular.

Comrade Kum Song sat by Choe Chil Song who seemed to be asleep, checking his pulse and massaging his legs. Chon Gwang Sik handed a slip of paper to the Comrade Commander.

"This was found in the rope bag."

"What is it?"

"It was in the strap of the rope bag here."

Chon Gwang Sik pointed to a miserable-looking rope bag of the kind that peasants carried. Attached to the rope bag were two pairs of hemp-sandals hung with icicles.

Comrade Kum Song opened the note and read it.

"One *mal* of foxtail millet and two pairs of hemp-sandals.

"This is for the Comrade Commander from a mother who

lives at the village of Ungdong 15 *ri* away from Tunhua. Whoever finds this, please convey it to Comrade Kum Song, Commander of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army."

His hands holding the paper trembled convulsively. He was going to say something but could not speak.

Everyone was surprised to see the Comrade Commander so profoundly moved on reading a few pencilled scribbles by Choe Chil Song who had been illiterate until only recently.

"They had such a hard time because of this...."

In shaking voice he repeated it to himself and taking up a spoon, put a spoonful of warm water into Choe Chil Song's mouth. He swallowed a few spoonfuls, and slowly opening his eyes, looked round with dim eyes. Then his eyes widened, and lit up. Realizing that he was facing the Comrade Commander whom he had been so anxious to see, he raised himself on his elbow and held out his hand.

"Comrade Commander!" Choe Chil Song's choking voice shook the stuffy air in the shed and pierced the hearts of all present.

Comrade Kum Song put his hand under his shoulder and held his waist to help him to sit on the bed.

"Comrade Commander! We...."

"Many thanks, Comrade Choe. Many thanks."

Choe Chil Song could say no more; he buried his head in his embrace and wept for sheer joy. Comrade Kum Song held Choe Chil Song's trembling body to him firmly, and cast his humane look at his cheeks down which the tears ran unceasingly. Han Hung Su, Chon Gwang Sik and a few others looked on breathlessly at the Comrade Commander and this man embracing like brothers, like a statue in one block. Presently Choe Chil Song opened his mouth.

"Comrade Commander, I'm all right. I can sit up by myself."

"You think you can?"

"Why not? I was a bit cold."

He propped himself up with both hands, and looked round.

"Where is Comrade Yong Suk?"

"She is over there. She is all right. She is already sitting up in bed."

"And where is the rope bag?"

"Here it is. And your slip of paper also...."

"Comrade Commander, a woman at Ungdong Village...."

"I know, I know."

The Comrade Commander quickly turned away his face, the tears glittering in his eyes.

At this moment Pyon In Chol came running into the shed and saluted to make a report.

"Comrade Commander, Comrade Se Gol has arrived."

He stood up. Se Gol was running down a hill a little way off. He handed over his rucksack full of books and newspapers to one of his friends. He rubbed his sweaty face with his hands, buttoned his jacket and ran up towards the shed from which the Comrade Commander had just emerged.

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The sun was already high in the sky. Se Gol had overslept for the first time in many days. He dressed himself neatly in his uniform, cleaned and pressed by his comrades, and went out of his shed. He reproached Chin Bong Nam who was standing on sentry.

"Why didn't you wake me? It's almost lunch time, isn't it?"

"The Comrade Company Commander asked me not to wake you up."

"That makes me very ashamed."

He started out for headquarters but changed his mind, and went to the shed where Chon Gwang Sik was billeted. When he reported to the Comrade Commander he must have his rucksack of newspapers and magazines with him. Arriving at the shed he clicked his heels and raised his hand in salute. Chon Gwang Sik, receiving his salute, said that he could go along to headquarters right away because the contents of the rucksack had already been sent there.

"But where did you get the *Experiences of Guerrilla Warfare*? I don't think the bookshops sell that sort of book...."

"I managed to get hold of it."

"Many thanks for your trouble anyway. Now you may go."

Se Gol felt elated on his way up to headquarters on the mountainside. Because he had performed his mission safely and, particularly because from Chon Gwang Sik's smiling face he

was sure that the book would definitely cause a sensation, as Pak Gi Nam had predicted.

It was warm. Though it was midwinter the snow on the sunny slope was melting and pearly drops of water dripped from the tips of icicles hanging from the trees. The sun's rays had turned the whole forest into a resplendent crystal palace. Blue mist floated leisurely past his knees and the sapphire sky peeped between the branches of the dark *punbi* tree.

Tall and slender-necked, Se Gol nodded to Pyon In Chol who was standing guard and entered the headquarters tent. At the log table the Comrade Commander was working on a document. He took Se Gol by the hand and led him to the fire. Water was boiling in the tin kettle hanging from the ceiling by a wire, and a bird with a multicoloured breast could be seen sitting on a tree through a narrow window opening.

"Did you get some sleep?"

"I've been sleeping."

"You still look tired."

"I feel fine."

Raising his hand to his smooth forehead, Se Gol changed his position slightly. He did not want the Comrade Commander to see the new scar on his forehead. The Comrade Commander pushed his document aside and with both hands took up the newspapers and magazines heaped on the table. Se Gol began reporting the details of his mission from the time he left the camp for Yungping and then went to Ryongdure Street, and from there back to Yungping again and then to Lohsing and all the way back. The Comrade Commander leafed through the latest papers and listened carefully to Se Gol, at times cocking his head to one side and at times expressing surprise. Se Gol was not very eloquent. He spoke quickly and kept straying away from his main narrative and going off at a tangent. But because he had seen and heard so many impressive events he described them in a very lively way, often with many gestures. The Comrade Commander looked at the headlines in the papers or carefully read the major articles. As he stretched out his hand to take books, Se Gol stopped talking.

"Continue. Very interesting. I feel as if I were experiencing it myself."

Having finished his narrative about how matters stood at Yungping, he went on to describe what had happened at Ryongdure Street. He spoke of what the streets looked like, the ex-

pressions on the faces of the people, the stingy and ungenerous treatment of travellers, the crowded trains, the incessant flow of truckloads of steel-helmeted Japanese troops heading northwards, the shopping streets lined with gorgeous advertisements, the Japanese flagstaffs soaring high, the wooden clogs swarming everywhere.

Se Gol was more spirited.

"Is Comrade Pak Hung Dok getting on all right?"

Comrade Kum Song put down a book, rose to his feet, took up the kettle and poured some water into a cup. Se Gol looked rather put out at the mention of Pak Hung Dok and heaved a sigh.

"Comrade Pak is in an awful state, Comrade Commander."

"In an awful state? Then his work is not progressing smoothly, you mean?"

He stopped pouring the water and turned round to face Se Gol.

"He is doing his work all right."

"Then, you mean...."

"Well, he has become a barber. But he's taking care of the Jap's hair every day. That is the filthiest job you can ever imagine. It's terrible!"

"He is a barber? Yes, he has the skill."

"That's not all. I first met him right in the middle of Ryongdure Street. I staggered back in surprise."

"You staggered back?"

Se Gol clicked his tongue bitterly and resumed.

"We met face to face right in the street. He was coming towards me, bending over like this, driving a horse for a Jap woman. I didn't believe my eyes at first. I waited for him to come close to me. But it really was Comrade Pak."

"Is that so? Ha, ha, ha!"

Comrade Kum Song burst out laughing, putting down the cup he had raised.

"So I said: 'Look here, Comrade Pak. What are you doing! Aren't you ashamed, you, a member of the guerrilla army?' And he only laughed and said: 'What's wrong with me? I stick at nothing to gain my end.' It was disgraceful!"

Se Gol shook his head, expressing his disgust. The Comrade Commander was amazed to hear Se Gol running down Pak Hung Dok though the former was far more adventurous than the latter. After laughing out loud for a while, he sat on the stool and wiping the corners of his eyes, said.

"But Comrade Pak was right. Comrade Choe Chil Song and Comrade Yong Suk disguised themselves as a married couple and were a great success in Tunhua."

"Disguised themselves as a married couple?"

Se Gol grinned, his face brightening.

"Yes, they did. She powdered her face, and broke through the checkpoint nicely, carrying a basket of eggs on her head. Haven't you seen Comrade Yong Suk yet?"

"I met Comrade Choe Chil Song last night, but he did not say a word about it."

"Go and see her. She had an awfully hard time. If we had found her one day later, you would never have seen her again. I've heard you used to go to her even at midnight to borrow her gun. Right?"

Se Gol hung his head, his face all aglow.

"What have you done to your forehead?" asked Comrade Kum Song, pointing to the dark scar as big as a penny.

Now at his wit's end, Se Gol changed his position, and stroking his forehead, grinned.

"Oh, it's nothing."

"You got hurt, didn't you?"

"I was arrested."

"Arrested?"

He was stunned and approached Se Gol.

"Those dogs hit me so hard with a fencing stick that I nearly fainted. They really are odd. They round up innocent people, but when I wanted to be arrested they didn't even look at me. So I had to commit a crime."

Se Gol told him how he had pretended to be drunk and visited Inspector Choe's house. Though the farce was fantastic Se Gol did not smile.

"So that's how you got this book, is it? Then you paid a big price for it."

As his hand reached for the little volume lying by the pile of books, Se Gol looked at him with sparkling eyes, again rubbing his forehead. The Comrade Commander picked up the book, glanced at the blue cover and the table of contents, and leafed through and stared at some pages. Chon Gwang Sik had told him that Se Gol had obtained this book but he did not know how. He leafed through again the book he had already read, this time with a smile on his face.

"Good. This is what I had expected," Se Gol told to himself, his heart leaping with joy.

"Have you read it?"

"No, I haven't. But Comrade Pak Gi Nam at Yungping told me that it is a great book, and that I would receive a rousing welcome at the unit."

"A rousing welcome? And you are ready to receive the rousing welcome, eh? What did Chon Gwang Sik say?"

"He thanked me."

"Thanked you?"

"Yes, he did."

"What would you do if somebody said the book was not so necessary?"

"I'd throw it away."

"You would? But you were beaten and hurt on the forehead to get it."

"But we can't use an empty cartridge, can we? I'll throw it away and get the substance."

"Get the substance? Where?"

Pushing aside the book on the table, Comrade Kum Song burst out laughing. He rose, and holding his forehead with both hands, he kept on laughing.

"Ha, ha, ha. Ha, ha, ha."

He laughed on, walking backwards and forwards. Se Gol was puzzled, and turning up the deep furrow of his upper lip, laughed faintly.

"Right, you are right. Even if you paid a high price for something, you have to be bold enough to throw it away when it is good-for-nothing. You were beaten and jailed. Ha, ha, ha. And you said you would be receiving a rousing welcome.... Ha, ha, ha."

Se Gol suddenly felt as sorry as if he had lost a bird he had caught and uttering a hollow laugh, pinched his chin with his hand in spite of himself.

"I read the book a few years ago and reread it last night. It gives you some knowledge now as it did before, but it is quite unsuitable for our particular situation. What you have said is right. We have our own way and our own method. We have no regular army support and no home front. Nor have we won the revolution. Our people, rivers, and forests are different from theirs."

Comrade Kum Song came up to Se Gol and affectionately

shook him by the shoulder. He made a detailed explanation of how to wage a national-liberation struggle in a colony mainly through armed struggle, which was entirely unique. In simple terms he explained that in observing any problem and seeking the solution, the Korean Communists must maintain the viewpoint that they were carrying the Korean revolution, not any other, namely, they must stick to the viewpoint of Juche, and that, therefore, they must apply Marxist-Leninist theory or any foreign experience to our own reality creatively.

When he had finished speaking, he strolled round the room with great satisfaction. All these latest events were ridiculous and fantastic but each of them satisfied him deeply. The naive girl who had been a nursemaid at a landlord's house at Togijom Valley cheated the military police nicely, with a chignon and a powdered face; meanwhile, another guerrilla has become a barber and, shaving the face of the chief of police, is collecting information. And still another guerrilla did not hesitate at being beaten and thrown into jail to gain his end. On the other hand, Cha Gi Yong, who has settled down in North Hamgyong Province, is working quietly down at the mine, dexterously calling on thousands of workers to join the revolutionary struggle. How thrilling!! The revolutionary seeds are growing sturdily; they don't lose sight of their goal even in the vast ocean and even if they are thrown into a desert or on the top of a cliff they strike roots and blossom. The revolution is useful in that it changes society, and it is necessary to give free rein to the talents and wisdom of the oppressed. Each of the pearls which lay neglected in the slough has begun to shine resplendently under the light of the revolution.

Se Gol was sitting silent, gazing at the red charcoal fire. Before he left, Comrade Kum Song thanked him and pointed out to him his merits and demerits, then advised him not to play the part of a drunk in a reckless attempt to obtain junk, which was like shooting a sparrow with a big cannon.

With a pocket notebook in his empty rucksack Se Gol walked nimbly through the forest. As he climbed down the rise, he could see the shed for the women guerrillas, and his heart leapt at the sight. He stretched out his hand to pull a bough overhead. The snow spattered on him, and he lifted up his face covered with snow and grinned.

Chin Bong Nam who was slender with a slightly bent back walked along, looking gloomily at the ground. He walked on and on through blizzard and forest. The cold gnawed at his vitals but his forehead perspired profusely. His chest was burning, his mouth parched.

Stooping to pick up a handful of snow he put it in his mouth. Though his taste buds were numb, his mouth hurt for a while and he felt a rushing sensation in his throat, chest and then his stomach. Soon his stomach felt relieved and he let out a quick breath. Dense vapour flitted over his shoulders like a cloud of pale smoke. His eyebrows and the peak of his fur cap were white with hoarfrost. Once you shut your eyes you could hardly open them and could not see a hand in front of you. Yet he went limping along lifting up his expressionless face. He was so hungry that he could not pull himself up to his full height. To make things worse, his toes were frozen and every step sent a searing pain shooting from his toes to his brain.

Limping along a few steps ahead was tall Yong Taek.

For three days the troops had been marching, without a bite to eat. The enemy's pursuit had been far more tenacious than had been expected and the battle had been extremely fierce. Due to the cold the enemy had slackened his attacks for a time but the activities of our underground political workers assigned to different areas had driven him out of his barracks to the mountains. The most malicious of all were the Ranam Division. They kept chasing the guerrillas despite the hard blows they received several times a day.

Chin Bong Nam watched the head of the file getting farther and farther away. He tried to move but his feet refused to budge; he hobbled a few steps only to fall down in the snow. Han Hung Su came running up.

"Come on, Comrade Chin. We'll soon take a rest."

"I'm all right. I'll be along soon. I've got to fix my shoes...."

Han Hung Su told him that there might be a safe place beyond the hill and urged him to keep on walking.

Chin Bong Nam put his foot upon a rock. His canvas shoes were a sorry sight, the toes were torn, they were filled with snow and his feet were terribly swollen. The straw ropes that had tied the canvas shoes on had loosened and slipped down to his ankles. Chin Bong Nam cast a desperate glance at them for a few seconds, and with a bitter smile hovering round his lips, started to untie them. The edges of the footcloths were soaked with frozen blood.

Putting Chin Bong Nam's feet on his knee Han Hung Su tied the rope. Soon they were walking on again. Holding Chin Bong Nam's arm on his shoulder Han Hung Su moved ahead, all but dragging him along.

As they came near the crest of the hill the wind blew with greater fury and whirled the snow into the sky, blurring out mountain summits, forests, valleys, and the whole of space. Raising his dark, glistening face, Chin Bong Nam grinned at the sky.

"Is this all you can do, you damn mischief-maker? Oh, hell!"

Grumbling, he paused for a moment, rubbing his eyes. To Han Hung Su who walked beside him, not a word he said was audible.

As soon as the troops had crossed the hill, they called a halt. They were going to pitch camp instead of taking a short rest.

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The troops still had to cross a stretch of flatland. Led by headquarters, they entered a field of willows in single file, one company after the other.

The enemy was already a kilometre or so behind. There appeared to be a range of low hills to the left but they soon sloped down onto flatland. To get to the mountains again it was necessary to cover more than 10 *ri*. This being the case, it was best for the unit to cross the open stretch in front of them, some five *ri* wide, in order to reach the shelter of the wood.

As if anticipating what the unit was about to do, the enemy

abruptly opened fire from machine guns. The snow-covered flatland was suddenly turned into a maddening whirlpool. Bullets spluttered, whisking the white snow into the air. Realizing that the situation was now tense, the guerrillas became strained and their eyes flashed with a fiery brilliance.

"Comrade Commander, please go ahead."

Han Hung Su, who never lost his head, pleaded with the Comrade Commander, worried, because he knew that as usual, he would stay in the dangerous rear.

"Don't worry about me. Lead the line ahead."

Han Hung Su was again confused seeing that the Comrade Commander had suddenly ordered his unit to enter the nearby open stretch of country instead of going into the plain, after skirting the mountainside. In a flash, however, he was amazed to note the Comrade Commander's agile tactics to reverse the situation at lightning speed. The enemy might not even think it possible.

"Please go down first, Comrade Commander. I'll look after the rear...."

"Hurry on!"

Seeing that his men were ill at ease, Comrade Kum Song's voice assumed a certain firmness. Casting a pleading glance at him, Han Hung Su turned round and looked at the slope behind, on which the enemy troops could already be seen. Pulling out his pistol, he shouted "Forward!" in a sharp tone. Swiftly the troops descended into the open. Supporting a guerrilla with frozen feet on either side, Chon Gwang Sik ran down through the snowdrifts. Limping on either side of him were Chin Bong Nam and Yong Taek whose feet had frozen a few days ago.

"Come on! It's not far. Let's go straight ahead."

Se Gol, who was several paces ahead, came back to help Chon Gwang Sik.

Now that the situation had changed all of a sudden, the enemy troops swarmed to the hilltop and began concentrated fire.

Se Gol dashed forward, dragging Chin Bong Nam.

"Leave me alone. You mustn't be delayed because of me."

Chin Bong Nam sat down on the ground, pushing Chon Gwang Sik away.

"Comrade Chin!"

Chon Gwang Sik's piercing eyes rested on his two comrades

in despair. Then Yong Taek tried to hold on to the trunk of a tree.

"Please leave us here. Ah, I can't go on."

"Yong Taek!" shouted Se Gol as he tore Yong Taek's hands away from the trunk, and holding him up, pulled him forward.

The enemy's fire was first concentrated on the head of the file and then gradually shifted to the middle in an attempt to cut off the line as the troops in the lead crossed the flat space and entered the forest. The bullets whizzed around their ears and cut into the earth only few paces away.

"Down!" yelled the Comrade Commander, having led his men into a hollow.

When Chon Gwang Sik pulling Chin Bong Nam got to the foot of a rise, the Comrade Commander was already a step ahead of them, taking Yong Taek.

"Comrade Commander! Oh, no, you mustn't. Not because of me...." Yong Taek pleaded desperately. Then he looked at Chon Gwang Sik, begging him.

"Leave me alone and go, Comrade Chon Gwang Sik. Don't worry about me.... No, please."

"What the hell are you talking about?" stirred to deep anger, Chon Gwang Sik shouted. The Comrade Commander, supporting Yong Taek, went ahead taking no notice of him. At this moment slush splashed around him.

"Ah!" shouted Yong Taek as he slipped from the Comrade Commander's hold to cover his back. Then Se Gol and Chon Gwang Sik lay down on the right side from which the enemy bullets were coming. To the left Han Hung Su prostrated himself. The Comrade Commander tried to get up but Se Gol would not let him, holding his back.

"You mustn't, Comrade Commander!"

Gasping, Han Hung Su looked at his face, tears in his eyes. The Comrade Commander's eyes suddenly suggested tears. However, the situation brooked not a moment's delay. All eyes were turned on him, the burning eyes of those who had tried to protect their leader. Again he looked round. More than half of the troops had managed to reach the forest.

"No one behind? Right. Forward. Follow me!"

He rose swiftly to his feet and holding Chin Bong Nam and Yong Taek on either side, ran up the rise covered with pussy willows; no one had had a chance to stop him. Then Chin Il Man's company already in the forest opened covering fire. In a

few minutes the whole of the unit was safely in the shelter of the forest. Han Hung Su and Chon Gwang Sik immediately took command of the companies firing in a line.

Now it was the pursuing enemy who was in the open, with no cover. The companies were expecting this, and opened a crossfire at the clear-cut targets. The snow-covered flatland swarmed with enemy troops, and one attacker fell after the other. The slightest movement invited a direct hit. Han Hung Su commanded his men, while firing his rifle by the trunk of a tree.

"Keep firing! Kill them all!"

It was, indeed, a thrilling sight. The numerous black spots wriggling all over the flat stretch of land like young silkworms on a screen became petrified in an instant and fell to the ground.

"It's better to kill them than have them behind us. Fire!" His eyes flashing, Han Hung Su again yelled to Chin Il Man.

Meanwhile, Yong Taek and Chin Bong Nam who had been carried deep into the forest were trembling violently, holding each other's hands, feeling as though they had committed a grave crime.

"Oh, because of us, the Comrade Commander...."

"I'd rather have killed myself. Then I wouldn't be in this shape."

Shedding tears Yong Taek slapped his feet.

"You damned feet! What's wrong with you? Why? What's the matter? You endangered...."

He wished he could chop off his useless feet with an axe. They looked at each other, wiped away the tears and stamped their feet. Pyon In Chol came running up to them producing a few rolls of bandage and ointment. He said that as soon as the enemy had lost the chance to attack, the Comrade Commander had instructed him to bring them these so that the two of them could treat their frostbite.

With the rolls of bandage and ointment in his hand, Yong Taek stood speechless for a moment staring in the direction of the disappearing Pyon In Chol and crying in a choked voice.

"Comrade Commander! Because of us you...."

He could not finish because of the lump in his throat. Yong Taek's heart was burning with unbounded pride and emotion as the Comrade Commander's soldier and with firm determination to dedicate his whole life to him, to repay him for even a small part of his favour.

"I thank you, Comrade Commander."

As he lowered his head, huge tears dropped onto the bandages in his lap.

Soon after this critical moment when the battle was nearly over, three double-winged planes raided our troops. Sweeping low, almost brushing the tops of the larch trees and dipping their wings, they strafed and bombed. One after another the enemy planes dived into the smallish wood right in the middle of the patch of open country which looked like an island in an ocean.

Squatting by a fallen tree and watching the enemy planes overhead, Chin Bong Nam shook his clenched fists.

"Sons of bitches...."

Seated beside him, Yong Taek spread the ointment on his feet, then putting on his shoes, raised and kicked his feet.

"Go to hell."

The planes came flying in at almost even intervals. Every time the bombs dropped the whole forest writhed and stout trees snapped in pieces. The strafing trimmed the treetops neatly like a huge sickle.

When dusk came Pyon In Chol ran from company to company carrying headquarters' instructions.

"Comrade Sin and Comrade O, headquarters is calling you. There is to be an oral exam for anti-illiteracy campaigners."

In high spirits Pyon In Chol rushed from one company to another, stamping on the snow which was covered with dust after the strafing. The guerrillas in each company received this round-eyed orderly as short as his rifle with shouts of joy, for he always brought good news from headquarters.

"Illiterate ladies and gentlemen are requested to gather. From this company Comrade Pang, Comrade Yang and who else? Oh, yes, Comrade Hwang...."

Until only recently he would flush furiously whenever he spoke, but now he talked unaffectedly, and often joked. Soon afterwards the campfires started burning here and there in the forest. At the top of the rise, Pyon In Chol mopped the sweat off his brow and, taking up a rifle that was far too long for his height, looked down at the spot where some of the guerrillas were learning the Korean alphabet.

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On a windless evening, unusually warm for winter, the unit entered Lotzoukou. They had left the interior of Tunhua, passed the southern bank of Lake Chingpo and crossed the Laoyehling Range, marching eastwards. They had had several skirmishes a day with Kwantung Army troops coming from Tunhua and the "Chientao Expeditionary Force" moving north. The enemy had been in hot pursuit, but suffered repeated setbacks. However, they rushed at the guerrillas in a frenzy knowing that they were following the main force of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army. So Comrade Kum Song made the unit cover their traces skirting the Huangshuiling Range and led them southwestward for a day and then quickly into Lotzoukou. He did so because, to decoy the enemy and give them a hard time all through the winter, he must reorganize the unit and reroute the march, and make sure that the work at the bases kept step.

On their arrival at Lotzoukou he held a meeting of the Soldiers' Council as planned. Representatives had come in from various districts, including Choe Gi Gap, Kwon Man Song, Kim Chang Sul, Li Chol Gun, and Yang Gi Hak, and also Chang Yong and Kim Chang Mun from the northern districts.

At the meeting the tasks assigned at Liangkang were analysed. Here, again the need to reinforce the guerrilla forces full scale and expand the bases was stressed. The organizers assigned to different districts must exert efforts not only to strengthen the liberated areas but to set up semi-guerrilla districts as well. For three days Comrade Kum Song heard reports from all the districts. He asked each of the men for every detail of their activity even though this involved some repetition.

Once again his attention was drawn to our relationship with the Anti-Japanese National Salvation Army. In some areas, because of the lack of understanding of the importance of this problem, there had been conflicts over trifling matters; there had been a tendency to fear the formation of a united front with them, instead of active, broad-minded efforts to attain it. Having heard Li Chol Gun's report, Comrade Kum Song criticized some ultra-leftist deviations manifested in the Wangching

district. He emphasized repeatedly the significance of a united front with the anti-Japanese forces in the neighbouring nation, saying that it meant the application of the principle of proletarian internationalism to the actual revolutionary struggle against Japan, and that it would give them valuable experience which should help in achieving a worldwide anti-imperialist united front.

Winding up the meeting Comrade Kum Song mapped out an operational plan to subdivide the task force into small mobile units of about 20 and to decoy the enemy into remote places, because the military actions taken so far by the main unit had achieved their goal. He pointed out that this was like the butterfly killing the cockerel and it would serve two ends: To harass large numbers of enemy force and to intensify political activity by sending many guerrillas to the bases. He decided to dispatch most of the guerrillas to Yungping where Li Chol Gun had been assigned; he had long been thinking of setting up headquarters in the Wangching district, or to be more exact, in the mountains adjacent to Mt. Mapanshan.

After the meeting, he had made decisions on a number of issues when an urgent report came in saying that enemy scouts had appeared on the highway, at the entrance to Lotzukou. In fact, by now the enemy who had earlier lost track of our unit, should be smelling out their whereabouts. In the Comrade Commander's view it was quite possible and in carrying out the revolutionary tasks it was somewhat inevitable. Therefore, he wound up the meeting in plenty of time and had completed all the necessary organizational work long before this development. He had been thinking of sending some men to lure the enemy if they had not made their appearance by now.

On receiving the news he had expected, Comrade Kum Song grinned and ordered immediate action. A team of 18 instantly left Lotzukou and kept going east of Ningan, drawing the enemy in their wake. At dawn of a bleak windy day, there was shocking news: Commander Wi's National Salvation Army troops had been encircled by the enemy near Laoheishan.

Comrade Kum Song realized now why the enemy had been less active for the last few days and saw through his manoeuvre to surround and wipe out our forces district by district, instead of pursuing us recklessly forever and a day.

The 18-man team radically changed its course and hurried southeastward towards the Soviet border. First of all, they had

to disperse and confuse the enemy forces that surrounded the National Salvation Army. On reaching a spot from where they could see Laoheishan, every ravine was littered with the bodies of the National Salvation Army soldiers. The forests, flatlands and everywhere were teeming with enemy troops. The planes kept flying low, strafing the surrounding countryside.

Han Hung Su who had been lying flat on his stomach raised his face covered with dirt.

"Ah!"

He groaned, his lips twitching convulsively.

"What's wrong?"

Chang Yong who had been lying by his side asked this question, his eyes wide open.

"Look over there."

Large numbers of enemy soldiers were heading straight for them. Presumably they had not spotted us yet but were waiting in a dugout position on the far side of the vast grassland, confident that we would eventually come.

"Comrade Han Hung Su! There are enemy forces on the left." This time it was Chin Il Man who shouted.

"Where?"

Han Hung Su looked in that direction and groaned again.

Surrounded! His heart sank. After some seconds he turned round. The Comrade Commander was sitting in a hollow, talking to one of his men. A plane swept past, almost touching the ground, raising a piercing noise. The snow whirled in the air, so they could not see even a few paces ahead. Soon afterwards white objects fluttered down. They were handbills.

"Sons of bitches!"

Holding his pistol up in the air, Han Hung Su glared at the dark blue sky. At this moment Comrade Kum Song called him and ordered him to go through to the left. Only after he received the order, did Han Hung Su recall that from the top of the hill he had just seen a log cabin on the hillside. The guerrillas took to the hillside covered sparsely with bristletooth oaks and swiftly disappeared.

To cope with the sudden change in the situation which had taken place behind them, the enemy forces left Commander Wi's troops whom they had entrapped, and quickly withdrew to surround the guerrillas like a crescent moon. Meanwhile the Kwantung Army troops who had lost their way and wandered for days pursuing the guerrilla unit to the north of Ningnan now appeared

belatedly and covered the northwestern side which had been unmanned. Thus the enemy were planning to tighten their encirclement gradually, confident that they had trapped the main force of the guerrilla army.

The guerrilla team took two hours to get to the log cabin on the rise. In white camouflage cloths they crouched on the snow whenever the planes swept by overhead. The planes returned at every few steps they took. Four white reconnaissance biplanes flew round in the air and dived in turn. Only after sunset did an ominous silence settle over the ground veiled in semi-darkness. From time to time it was broken by sporadic heavy machine-gun fire from all directions. Slowly night came on.

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Hara turned up the collar of his dog-fur coat, but he could not stay still because his feet were so cold. He could hardly see because the strong lenses of his spectacles were steamed up with his breath. The forest was packed with troops of the Kwantung Army and the "Chientao Expeditionary Force" of the 19th Division at Ranam. Everywhere there was the sound of trees being chopped, intermingled with angry raucous yells. While waiting for the campfire to burn, Hara limped towards the tent where Horimoto was staying. The tent was set up in a hollow protected from the wind. Hara felt his cheeks bitten by the icy wind. He walked, leaning on his toes, to lessen the pain.

"Mr. Hara, this is your first taste of the North Pole wind, is it not?"

Horimoto, a dark-faced Japanese colonel, stuck out his unshaven triangular chin as he folded a map on his lap.

"Everything is new to me, not only the North Pole wind."

"And it's the first time you have seen us beheading people with our Japanese swords, eh?"

Horimoto spoke in a jocular manner, taking something out of his pocket and chewing it.

"And it's quite new to me to see this densely populated mountain where there is not a house to be seen, in the middle of winter."

"You are lucky. I'm having a hard time, risking my life.

But you are making money, by seeing spectacular things. If you finish your book, you think you can buy a lovely villa? Yours is a profitable, secure and wonderful job compared with soldiering."

"Well, that's how it is...."

Hara did not want to go on talking, but he couldn't stay silent.

"When on earth will the invincible Imperial Army meet the enemy? The Communists?"

"We might not meet them at all."

"Then...."

"If they are wiped out, you won't see them."

"Ha, ha, ha, ha. Ha, ha, ha, ha."

"Are you laughing at me?"

Horimoto's triangular eyes glared, hostile.

There were footsteps outside the tent.

"Who's there? Come in."

A tall thin sergeant entered with a carrier pigeon in his hands. He saluted, moving his limbs like a puppet on a string and approached Horimoto.

"Is it dead?"

"No, sir. It's just dazed."

The grey pigeon was ducking its head, unable to lift it and merely goggling its eyes.

"It's deadly cold. How many degrees?"

"Forty-two below, sir. And I think we've got to keep it warm...."

"Well, it can't be helped. We can't send messages. Even if you keep it in your jacket day and night, once it's sent up into the air, it will be finished, you know."

"How about sending me to a warm place for the time being, sir?"

"You stupid ass! About turn. Be off!"

For a moment the sergeant was plain stupefied. Then he hurriedly saluted and withdrew.

"Well, I was told you met the guerrilla chief yourself. Is it true?"

Horimoto had asked him this question several times in the past month. In fact, everyone who had met him did the same—the generals at the Headquarters of the Kwantung Army and the high-ranking officers of the Ranam Division.

Hara was annoyed, and puffing at his cigarette, replied in a matter-of-fact tone.

"I not only met him, I even talked with him for a long time."

"Why, that's tremendous. You might call it a historical event."

"Frankly speaking, the fate of the Greater Empire of Japan is in the hands of the Korean guerrilla chief."

"What are you talking about? The authorities won't leave you alone."

"I'm telling what I saw. But those gentlemen who haven't seen him and are only gripped by sheer curiosity might pay a heavier penalty."

"But, anyhow, you too belong to the *Yamato* race, don't you, Mr. Hara?"

"I hope I will never regret it."

"I think we'll have to recommend your case as the biggest news of the year."

"It would be incorrect to call it my case. However, the fact that the guerrilla chief General Kum Song had declared war on the Greater Empire of Japan could be the biggest scoop. From the historical viewpoint also, it can be regarded as one of the greatest events. What do you say?"

"Isn't that going too far? You always talk in an ambiguous manner. Better watch your tongue."

"Wait and see. Both of us had better avoid drawing over-hasty conclusions."

As Horimoto of the triangular face frowned betraying his bad mood, a stocky staff officer suddenly came into the tent. He reported that the number of men with frostbite had doubled since yesterday, dejectedly shaking his head which was unusually small for his body.

"Oh, those stupid donkeys! As long as they got frozen in front of the campfires, I'm not to blame for that. So we've got a regiment of cripples, eh?"

"By the way, Colonel, where is that target we're going to attack?"

The round-faced Hara enquired sarcastically, casting a disdainful look at the other.

"Our target? That's clear. Communism."

Horimoto was about to tell him that according to informa-

tion received the guerrillas had been encircled completely, but thought better of it.

"Ha, ha, ha."

"Mocking me again, eh? Look, the next time you laugh at me, you'll be my target of attack and I'll pull out my sword."

Horimoto glanced at the thick Japanese sword hanging at his side.

"Can't you see your target with your naked eye? The army is not supposed to attack an abstract idea."

"Unlike athletes, the army attaches greater importance to orders than to the goal."

This amused Hara but he did not laugh. The army's simplicity was really amazing as far as their targets were concerned. He wondered why they were all so stereotyped. Most of the Japanese high-ranking army officers whom he had met were just like this colonel. Hara wanted to say, "I wish you all good health..." but he merely turned on his heels laughing.

On the way back to his tent, he heard moans here and there. During the last one week or so the number of the soldiers with frostbite had increased rapidly.

It was a common sight to see oozing frozen ears that looked like steamed radishes.

There was an uproarious noise from the direction of the staff officers' quarters. Hara went there to find many soldiers interrogating a "prisoner". Inside the tent was the "prisoner" who was an old Korean of about 60 in a patched jacket. His eyes were bluish rather than dark, and looked highly intelligent. The Japanese soldiers tried to threaten or cajole him but no one was able to crush his intransigence.

"I don't know what communism is."

"Haven't you seen the guerrillas?"

"I have no one to rely on. So I came to this mountain to eke out my living by farming and hunting. You can kill me if you want to but what I don't know, I have to say I don't know."

This was the reply of Old Ma, the owner of the log cabin, whom the Japanese could not cow.

Around ten o'clock at night the telephone rang incessantly and Horimoto's yelling voice was heard. Though the campfire was burning Hara felt so cold that he went back to his tent. He put on another dog-fur coat and sat down by the kerosene lamp. He wrote:

"...It is just like waving a hand in the air.

"For three full months now, a huge force of the Kwantung Army has been advancing on both sides of the Mt. Paekdu-san range and along other major mountain ranges. All the Japanese high-ranking officials I met at Port Arther, Mukden, Seoul, Riam and Hoeryong spoke in the same vein: 'We'll wipe out the communist guerrillas by the end of this year.' However, I haven't seen a single dead communist soldier yet.

"Everywhere the Imperial Army advanced furiously with watchful eyes. Planes were mobilized and thousands of vehicles drove forward at full speed. Tens of thousands of guns fired without ceasing. Bullets were sprayed over the forests, into rock crevices and across the grass over a territory several times larger than Japan. And what is the result? Nothing. This being so, we should be reasonable and ask ourselves these questions: 'Is there a front before the advancing Japanese Army?' 'Is there an enemy before the muzzle of the Japanese gun?'

"These questions may sound absurd, even fantastic, but they are realistic. Because the Japanese Army have never changed their formation to order of battle; they have never found any territory or position to occupy.

"In a word this is a battle without a front; shooting without a target. This is clear even to six- or seven-year-old boys who play soldiers with millet stalks, but our generals on active service do not see it...."

There was the report of a gun nearby. With his fountain pen still in his hand Hara darted out of the tent and asked the soldiers what had happened. Three soldiers laughed in different tones of voice, showing their yellow teeth.

"We scared the guts out of the old Korean. I put my gun on his head and fired. But he is so dumb he didn't even blink. Hi, hi, hi."

"Oh, why do that sort of thing? Now you are showing the old man your subnormal mentality."

On saying this disdainfully, Hara returned to his tent and bent down to carry on writing.

"They are just like that. When a fool is conscious that he is a fool, he may cease to be a fool. They are intolerably base.

"Can we call the whole of the Korean peninsula bulging out into the south on the eastern end of the Asian continent, a front? Can we call all Koreans our enemies? If this is so, what is the use of manoeuvring on the Mt. Paekdu-san range? If the General Staff regards the whole thirty millions as our enemies,

a little over one hundred thousand soldiers is too meagre a force to deal with them. Doesn't this mean that Japan, which has been highly civilized since the Meiji Restoration, is going back to the era when Emperor Jinmu used to scurry around, with a golden kite fixed to the top of his bow?

"That night last spring when the new moon hung in the sky, I was told in a wild walnut thicket: 'You shall write your scoop on the victory of our Korean national-liberation revolution.'

"I think no man can ever be really impartial. As for me, Hara, I can only have a definite viewpoint if I stand by the *Yamato* race. Then I shall only be entitled to rejoice when I report a victory for the Japanese Army. But it seems to me that Japan is gasping in confrontation with Invincibility. It is a great mistake to think that everything alive can be destroyed by fire and bullets. New buds sprout more vigorously after a fire...."

Hara stopped writing and went out into the blizzard. What he wrote he could not show to anybody. He was writing from force of habit. He thought of a grain of sand in a whirlpool. In theory it should sink to the bottom, but it kept spinning round and round in the bubbles. Someone was speaking in clumsy Korean.

"Lookkee here, oldee man. When you see the guerrillas, you must tellee us. Else I cut your throat. See?"

There was still a lot of noise in the staff officers' tent. Another "fist" was being clamorously prepared to be wielded in the air. Let's wait and see what will come out of the heavy four-kilometre encirclement that Horimoto is boasting about. I'll see if they can guarantee a success after 99 setbacks.

"Ouwv!"

Some one moaned painfully in the tent on his left, apparently holding his feet. The moaning grated on Hara's ears like a bad omen. He pulled a wry face and turned away.

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There were two log cabins on the hillside. Both of them tiny and shabby.

There was no snow round the chimney of one of them, so it had obviously been inhabited until a few days ago. In the

kitchen there were a cooking pot and a few bowls. Two deer-skins hung on the wall. The other log hut was completely dilapidated; the mud floor was cracked and the snow had blown into the room through cracks in the doors. The guerrillas decided to use this cabin. They roughly swept the snow off the earthen porch and spread wormwood stalks on it. After dark, they lit a fire in the fireplace. All of them squatted on their haunches in the kitchen and in the room. As soon as they sat down they dozed.

Han Hung Su and Chon Gwang Sik stood guard at both ends of the building. However, they, too, dozed as soon as they took up their positions in the opening they had cleared in the snowdrift. Han Hung Su fought the drowsiness overcoming him, biting his tongue or rubbing his brow against the tree trunk. The hardworking Kwon Man Song chopped a white birch tree quietly and brought it down. They were anxious to know who would come to this log cabin where a hunter might stay all winter until the spring.

When night fell there was the sound of footsteps and an old man in a fur cap arrived. It was Old Ma. Han Hung Su signalled by waving a tree branch. Chon Gwang Sik acknowledged the signal and reported to the Comrade Commander. Fortunately, Old Ma was coming home after an unexpected mishap. For the last few days Japanese troops had been running about like mad dogs and even aircraft had been flying overhead. So he had not thought the situation encouraging. However, he had never expected that he himself would be mixed up in the trouble. He was limping because the Japs had beaten him on his thigh. As he approached his log hut, he felt there was something strange about it; smoke was rising from the empty hut and there were men inside.

"Good God!"

He feared that hunters, usually around at this time of the year, had arrived. He coughed intentionally and turned away from chimney, when some one who had been standing in the dark yard came up to him.

"Are you the owner of the hut?"

The deep voice sounded friendly.

"Yes, I am."

This man was not a hunter. He was in a khaki uniform and had a pistol at his side. Many people came out of the hut which had been empty, and greeted the owner. They were all young

men of about the same age. They asked him to allow them to spend the night there.

"Excuse us, for coming in while you were away."

"Not at all. This is an empty hut...."

"But you must be the master of this mountain."

Old Ma entered the kitchen and lit a fire in the fireplace. He wanted to cook something to eat but did not feel strong enough because his whole body ached. He pretended to busy himself, while watching the strangers closely. He examined them carefully but they seemed to be good fellows. His chopped firewood piled up in the yard was untouched. They were young Koreans armed with guns. Since he had seen many soldiers of the Righteous Volunteers Army and the Korean Independence Army, he knew at a glance that these youths belonged to a different category. Then who could they be? Old Ma kept smoking, squatting on his haunches in the kitchen. Late at night Comrade Kum Song opened the kitchen door and came in.

"Don't you feel well, Grandpa?"

"Well...I'm all right."

The old man drew back, taking his pipe from between his lips.

"But I saw you limping and you look very ill."

On saying this Comrade Kum Song seated himself in front of the fireplace.

"Well."

Old Ma heaved three deep sighs before telling him what had happened that day. At first, this Korean youth looked quite an ordinary young man, the kind of man you might meet anywhere; but the longer he talked, the more he appeared to have something kind-hearted and dignified about him. The old man took two puffs in silence, and then spoke.

"Might I ask you a question? What are you doing, you young fellows?"

With a smile at the corner of his lips, Comrade Kum Song looked at the old man's inquiring eyes for a while, then said:

"We are the ones the Japs are trying to capture. We are the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army fighting to free our homeland."

"What?!" Old Ma's long beard trembled under his chin. "Are you Communists?"

"Yes. What's wrong? Are you afraid?"

"Oh, no. But there are thousands of Japanese here, you know."

The old man mumbled with a sigh; he was at a loss what to say. He conversed with him for a little while and then limped out of the hut.

"Build up the fire."

Soon he came in, carrying a basketful of potatoes, as big as rice bowls. They rolled over the kitchen floor.

"Let's steam the potatoes and have a chat the whole night through."

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Next day the team was divided into five groups and went out on a reconnaissance mission to find a spot to break through the encirclement.

Comrade Kum Song also went out to acquaint himself with the terrain and study the situation. He was guarded by Chon Gwang Sik and Chin Il Man.

By dusk all the groups came back except Song Dok Hyong's. All of them were frozen and exhausted. They had had to crawl in the snow all the way. The enemy was everywhere. To cross a hilltop they had to crawl for hours. Old Ma who had volunteered for the undertaking had not come back yet. In the room discussions went on: On how to break through the encirclement. Han Hung Su listened to the report of each group. His face turned white because the news was bad. The situation was clear, however. The unit was enclosed within a circle five kilometres in diameter. It was not clear whether the Japanese knew the guerrillas were encircled or whether several units that had been moving around in different areas had converged on this particular spot for some reason or other. At any rate the Japanese troops seemed to be waiting for orders, and were at present idling, and banking up their fires.

As soon as day broke, a plane went into action, apparently looking for a target.

"Now, Comrades, let's discuss this. Comrade Song Dok Hyong hasn't come back yet, but the situation is clear to us, isn't it? In a word we are encircled. We are in multiple rings of encirclement. What can we do to find a way out?" Han Hung Su said impatiently, without taking off his drenched coat. His

shoulders and chest were wringing wet. But he had no time even to feel it. Everyone in the room realized that the situation was serious because it concerned the safety of the Comrade Commander and so would affect the development of the whole Korean revolution. Therefore, actions must be very carefully thought out before the Comrade Commander came. Han Hung Su was restless and so was everyone else, desperately anxious. The more anxious they felt, the more oppressive the atmosphere in the room became. None of them spoke although usually they vied with each other to explain their views on any problem, even on such comprehensive problems as world revolution.

Han Hung Su's brows twitched nervously, though he seldom lost his composure and knew how to hide his feelings. To his mind the heavily oppressive air of the room was just as grave as his unit's encirclement by thousands of enemy troops. It reflected the seriousness of the situation. It meant that no one thought there was much chance of a breakthrough or had yet found even a suspicion of a solution.

"Comrades, try to get to the heart of the matter. Don't dwell on irrelevancies. First we must find a way to get out of this encirclement. Let's not worry about anything else, for this is the immediate problem."

Han Hung Su lowered his small voice almost to whisper. But his lowered voice was not even, and at times it became awkwardly loud.

All of a sudden Kim Chang Mun spoke up as though he could not stand it any more. He was a man of few words, always reluctant to join in any debate, even when he was called on. Now he shouted irritably and loudly.

"First of all we must admit that we did not foresee this situation. We mustn't think vaguely about hardships, that we will suffer from cold and hunger, that at times we will be driven into danger because of the enemy. We are not alone; we are accompanying the Comrade Commander. That's why we need to have the utmost vigilance and guarantee his security. Secondly, we should have taken a scientific and realistic attitude to the signs we've seen. When the enemy appeared, there was still a chance to move our headquarters to a safe place and we should have done so. However, we were intoxicated with the pleasure of accompanying the Comrade Commander. Thirdly, I am against this indecision. I'm afraid some of us still tend to wait for luck."

"What's the use of criticizing now?" retorted Kwon Man Song in a gruff voice, changing his position.

"Let's discuss how to get over this crisis, as Comrade Han Hung Su proposes. In my opinion there is only one decision to make: How to solve the problem with the smallest sacrifice. Sacrifices are inevitable, and if we hesitate, we'll face a still worse situation. But there's no need to be discouraged. We were prepared for this sort of thing, weren't we?"

Around this time Comrade Kum Song entered the kitchen. Having been informed by the sentry of the return of the reconnaissance groups, he sent Chon Gwang Sik who had accompanied him, to meet Song Dck Hyong's group, and entered the kitchen just as Kim Chang Mun was making his scathing criticism. Quietly he approached the fireplace, pushed the smouldering log deeper into the fire and took out a heap of red charcoal. As he took off his coat, lumps of snow dropped into the blaze hissing and letting off steam. His feet were soaked too. Slowly he put down his coat and fur cap by the cooking pot, squatted in front of the fire and took off his canvas shoes.

"The situation is not as simple as that. Let me hear them discuss how they'll overcome this crisis using the strength and wisdom they have accumulated this year...." He said to himself with a faint smile round his lips. As he held out his hands to the glowing charcoal, he felt as though he was seeing the uncanny development he had just witnessed in the flickering light.

"This is a good thing, I think...and so do my comrades. Now is the time for us to analyse what we've done this year in order to bring about a fundamental change in the next phase of the revolution and discuss our actions to make an advance from this point."

Every time the snowstorm howled furiously and the kitchen door rattled, the huge shadows of the flames swayed. The wind roared; the forest was writhing and roaring.

Presently the warm hazy patterns before his eyes were replaced by the countless crests of mountains and long snowbound paths he had trekked.... That time too the mountains and rivers were covered with snow. The Amnok-gang River was silent; there was no sound of water. There were no birds in the sky, just the wind blowing upward over the icebound river. The shrivelled grass was leaning on the ground, the glassy powdery snow was raising a mist and flew past his cheeks. When he placed his feet on the surface of the ice, he could go no further.

He turned round. The field path leading to Mangyongdae ran round the foot of the mountain and stretched as far as the eye could see. The snow-blanketed mountains, the tree branches shaking in the wind, the lane—this was all he could see of his homeland. He could not tear his eyes away from the scene. When will I set foot again on this land if I leave now? He stepped backwards a few paces and, with moist eyes, gazed at the distant hills. The wind howled, lapping the riverside. Step by step he trudged onwards to the middle of the river before he knew. His feet in padded socks covered with rubber shoes packed down the snow, leaving clear-cut tracks. With clenched fists he compelled his feet to carry him forward and softly sang the song he had once heard at the ferry.

*Blue waters of the Amnok River,
My rivers and my hills
When shall I come home again to you?
I'll come when I have made my wish come true
And freed my native land.*

"When next will I set foot on this land? When can I return to this land of my birth, where I was raised and where my ancestors are buried?" Clutching at his chest, he cast another backward glance before plodding on through the snow. His footsteps traced a dotted line to the horizon, and a gust of wind swept round the bend in the mountain, sending up a cloud of snow.

"Homeland, home village, farewell! One day I will come back, when I free you!"

Suddenly Kwon Man Song's husky voice came from the room. Jerked back from his memories, Comrade Kum Song raised his head.

"I've nothing further to say. Every minute, every second is precious. If we hesitate, we might plunge the Korean revolution into a catastrophe. Let's act quickly. Once this night is over then...."

Before he finished speaking some one yelled again. It was Kim In Ryong, normally a taciturn man, but at crucial moments like this he would express his opinion in no uncertain terms.

"I fully agree with Comrade Kwon. Please include me in the death-defying corps to break through the ring of encirclement. I'll consider it a task of honour. If you know how to live like a true man, then you must know how to die like a true man. I

know that one's last moment to sum up one's life is important. If you dedicate your whole life to the revolution but at the moment of death turn round and get shot in the back, you are a coward, a renegade; on the other hand if you die a heroic death shot in the chest while fighting, even though you have accomplished no remarkable feat, you will be regarded as good fighter." From time to time long, deep breaths could be heard from the room.

The wind was still venting its fury. Fine flakes of snow lashed the wall of the cabin. The howl of a hungry wolf could be heard nearby, soon to be joined by the whole pack howling in unison.

As he sat in front of the fire which was throwing mottled shadows, he continued to recall the long and arduous path he had traversed. He had no immediate solution, either. They were surrounded, in an inner and outer ring, and it was going to be no easy task to cut through. The chunks of white birch were flaring, forming red charcoal in the fireplace. The leaping shadows of the flames danced on the wall and floor. Comrade Kum Song turned over his steaming cap and coat, and stared at the flickering flames. Sharp voices could still be heard from all sides of the room.

"It's Comrade Chin Il Man's turn now."

After a quick grin, he was again shrouded in thoughts. There was the blunt voice of Chin Il Man.

"Engels was so well versed in military science that he was nicknamed the 'General'. But as far as I know, he didn't write anything about how to break out of an encirclement."

Even in this situation he stuck to his habit of talking.

"But can the revolution succeed without sacrifice? No, it can't. We'll only win victory at the cost of sacrifices. All of us here are around 20. We are youths, not old men who have almost lived out their lives. So life is very precious to us. If we have anything to dedicate surely it is our youth, isn't it? Love demands dedication. To protect our country, let's dedicate our youth."

There were a few moments of silence.

Comrade Kum Song pondered over the dedication of youth just mentioned by Chin Il Man. How beautiful those words! And how pathetic! They are freely uttering these beautiful words which only those among the millions in the world who dedicate their youth to revolution are entitled to utter. The faces of O Sang Gwon and Li Dong Chon flashed across his mind. These

faces apparently watching the development of the Korean revolution from high above in heaven seemed to be smiling.

There was a faint smell of burning rubber—the soles of his canvas shoes. Gazing vacantly at the dancing flames, he touched the inner sole. It was still wet. But he felt something soft underneath it. Wondering what it was, he gave a tug. Underneath was Mother's hair. Ever since he had changed into the shoes Chŏl Ju had brought him, he had never had cold feet. Once, when he was going to south Manchuria, she had prepared his shoes in the same way.

The hand, touching the hair, trembled.

"Mother!" he called in a choked voice clutching the inner soles, and closing his eyes. In his mind's eye he could see Mother's affectionate gaze as last spring he bade her farewell for the last time. He could hardly shut the door and hurried away as fast as his feet would carry him. When he had turned round for one last look at the edge of the village, Mother dressed in white was still seeing him off, waving her hand, as if asking him to hurry away and return in triumph.

The pair of shoes she had got for him on the eve of her death were still wet beside the fireplace. She had nothing to leave him nor had she even written a will. What had she been thinking when putting the scissors to her hair in those last moments? What had she been thinking, closing her eyes alone and in an alien land, deprived of her homeland by the Japanese, deprived of her family, having seen her son off on an unknown journey?

"Mother!" He again muttered in a choking voice. Mother's last breath warmed his chest through his arms; his body was permeated by Mother's love that was far stronger, far weightier and far more ardent than a hundred, than a thousand words, as well as her passionate desire to see her country free. His chest contracted, he looked up at the wall on which the shadows of the flames were still flickering. Then Mother's face gave way to the face of Yong Ju, with round, sparkling eyes, holding out those potatoes. His eyes were blurred with the tears. He looked up at the wall again, but saw nothing. Suddenly a feeling of loneliness descended on him; blinking his eyes he tried hard to suppress his excitement and calm himself down.

"I'll free our homeland come what may, as you wished, and return to Mangyongdae and meet Grandfather and Grandmother," he pledged. His face revealed a firm resolve. Somewhat later he picked up the still wet shoes, pushed in the inner soles

and tied up the laces. An unknown voice came from the room. A comrade was speaking in a doleful voice as though the revolution was a fiasco, and another was pouring out that sad, pathetic feeling of one who is facing his last hour. Comrade Kum Song remained seated in front of the fireplace, thinking how to tide over this situation, to do Mother's will. If she saw this scene here, what would she say? If she saw the tree she had tended all her life torn by a gust of wind, she might be grief-stricken and turn away her face.

"All of you are right."

He gave a start and raised his head; Han Hung Su's voice with a barely audible tremble in it broke the heavy silence. Why did his voice tremble? He should understand what the situation meant. Of course, Comrade Kum Song fully understood why Han Hung Su had held this discussion himself. It was not to be denied that a serious discussion was needed. However, Han Hung Su should not have spoken in that tone of voice. Leisuredly he slipped his arms into his sleeves and buttoned his coat.

"It is good to sacrifice yourselves; it's good to dedicate your youth. Now we've reached agreement and we have made up our minds. What have we learned so far? We've realized the scientific way to communism and we have equipped ourselves with this ideology.

"We've come to understand what the dictatorship of the proletariat means and what has to be done. Also, we have acknowledged our revolutionary line which creatively applied that idea to our situation.

"Then, we began an armed struggle which has brought this progress as you see. What is more, we've grasped the fact that our revolution and our victory are on the way, that our future is bright under the leadership of Comrade Kum Song, the great leader of the Korean revolution, who has integrated theory, ideas and methods. The greatest honour for any Communist determined to see the Korean revolution through is that he is under the leadership of Comrade Kum Song, the heart and brain of our revolution, and that he is ready to give his life to protect him. Therefore, now that we are hard pressed, nothing is more important for us than to dedicate our lives to protect him. So I propose this: A couple of us, three or four of us at the most, must accompany the Comrade Commander and break through the ring, while the rest of us fight the enemy to the death with me."

"Good."

“Who will remain?”

At this moment there were footsteps outside and then the sound of stamping feet shaking off the snow. Song Dok Hyong's group and Chon Gwang Sik who had gone out to meet them had just arrived. Comrade Kum Song rose unhurriedly and opened the kitchen door; he shook hands with each member of the group in turn and led them to the fire.

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Han Hung Su could not see clearly ahead; he did not know whether it was because of the darkness or the blizzard. However, he thought he could see Comrade Kum Song's back a few steps ahead, as clearly as though graven in his heart. He was conscious of neither cold nor wind; his heart was bleeding at the thought that this was the last time he would be with Comrade Kum Song. The night scene at Huatien, the gathering to form the Down-with-Imperialism Union; the lane in front of the Yao-wang Temple at Peishan Park; Chialun thick with wild flowers; the mountain lane at Kuyushu and the field at Wuchiatzu—all these memories that included Comrade Kum Song appeared and faded in the greyish snow. Let's dedicate our lives! Chin Il Man and many other comrades proposed this. What sort of dedication?

Everyone considered it worthy and honourable to dedicate his life to the triumph of the Korean revolution, to Comrade Kum Song, the great revolutionary leader. Han Hung Su, however, was trudging along this snow-covered lane steeped in profound sorrow. The thought that this nocturnal journey would soon be over tore the iron heart of a man who had been steeled in the tempest of the revolution.

The snowstorm howled like numerous packs of wolves. The forest shrieked and groaned. There was nowhere to talk quietly. But Comrade Kum Song walked on silently through the blizzard. Han Hung Su looked up at the oppressive sky with neither moon nor stars. The night was well advanced. His affection for the leader prevented him from going back; one moment of hesitation would end in a loss of such proportions that it might take a hundred years to repair it.

"Comrade Commander!"

Han Hung Su stood erect, lifting up his face, while the snowstorm whipped his cheeks.

"You should return now. To be quite honest, we had a discussion among ourselves before you came back."

"I overheard it," said he, without turning back, and slowly kept on.

"Then...."

For a moment Han Hung Su was taken aback, but he thought this was rather fortunate. He had to reveal what they had discussed but it was proving rather embarrassing to talk to the Comrade Commander personally about his own safety.

"Comrade Commander, please let us do what we have decided as far as this matter is concerned. Since you overheard it, I won't go into the details. But, to be quite frank, there should not be a moment's delay."

Han Hung Su pleaded in a shaky voice, barely managing to suppress his tears.

"I can't approve of that decision."

"What?"

The Comrade Commander's voice was resolute, with even a slight note of anger in it. Han Hung Su shrank back, standing motionless, unable to utter a word. Then the Comrade Commander slowly turned round to face Han Hung Su.

"Now tell me. I would like to know your motives. Why did you draw such a conclusion and prepare the roster of the members of a death-defying corps? I'm not going to blame individual comrades for their viewpoints. At any rate, from their respective positions, they made a thorough analysis of the situation and expressed their resolve. On the whole, their speeches were good, some of them even excellent. However, is it possible to agree to the conclusion reached by you, Comrade Han Hung Su, commander of a unit, that summed up those fine viewpoints?"

A huge mass of snow slid down a nearby slope and shot into the air, cutting off their path. Han Hung Su looked frozen; though pushed aside by the avalanche, he did not stir, and stood with his head lowered.

"Comrade Han, come over here."

He called to Han, brushing the snow off the shoulders of his fur coat. Han Hung Su mechanically walked over to a thick log.

"It's less windy here."

The Comrade Commander cleared the thick snow off Han's shoulders and said sharply:

"Are we in a bad situation? Indeed we are. At this moment of the night you might regard it as unfavourable and, in a sense, you might say it's hopeless. However, our country is in the same situation. For more than 20 years the Japanese imperialists have occupied Korea by force of arms. Because all parts of the country swarm with Japanese police and troops, no Korean can breathe freely. And now the Japs have swallowed Manchuria. This being so, it is no easy task to force the formidable Japanese imperialists out and achieve independence. So now we are as hard pressed as the homeland. Now can we honestly say that this situation is quite unexpected? I don't think we can. It would be more correct to say that, when fixing our strategic goal for the year 1932, we decided to create this situation of our own will. Comrade Han, let's recall what we took into account and calculated in planning our march at Liangkang. You'll easily realize that this situation has unfavourable aspects as well as highly favourable aspects. Even if the situation had turned the way you might have expected, we could have changed our course as soon as we got to Lotzoukou. And we should have not dispersed our unit and maintained our main force. In this context, however, you must consider this:

"If we had ended our winter march at the Lotzoukou area, the enemies who had pursued us all the way would not have had to face the cold, and would be able to carry on with their 'punitive operations' after a comfortable rest in warm quarters. This would have been tantamount to giving up our Liangkang policy and would have meant great losses for the local fledgling guerrilla companies and for the revolutionary masses. Not only that. Had we kept the main force together instead of breaking it up and sending units out to various areas, we would not have been able to build up these areas so fast and our march would have been far more difficult. We would have been suffering from a much more severe food shortage and we could hardly have concealed ourselves from the enemy's watchful eyes. We came here to aid the encircled National Salvation Army troops. That was our main purpose here, and that action was entirely correct and justified. It was necessary for us and for the Chinese people as well. The policy we have been pursuing is correct. This situation resulting from it is extremely hard, but it is inevitable for the advance of the Korean revolution."

Han Hung Su remained silent, his head still bent. As for the Comrade Commander's analysis of the situation, he had heard it at the meeting in Liangkang and more than once during the march. Encouraged by this analysis, and in accordance with the policy, Han Hung Su had mapped out the unit's action plan and commanded battles. It was true that he had expected dangers and hardships. However, he had never imagined that any hardships, any adversity might endanger the Comrade Commander himself. He had thought this was quite impossible. Had he foreseen this possibility, he would never have agreed to this march. No Korean Communist could accept any action that might endanger Comrade Kum Song. Han kept his mouth shut tight. Comrade Kum Song looked at his face for a few moments and burst out laughing....

"So our comrades are preparing to fight to the death at the log cabin, eh? And you are going to join them after you have said good-bye to me?"

Han Hung Su looked up quickly. The tears were running down his face. Comrade Kum Song's figure loomed large in his blurred eyes.

"Comrade Han, don't do this sort of thing. You are not a man who started making revolution yesterday. With whom do you think I should make revolution after burying you comrades here in this valley? If you all die as a death-defying corps, who do you think will carry on the Korean revolution?"

"Comrade Commander!"

Han Hung Su buried his face in the Comrade Commander's chest. His shoulders heaved violently with sobbing. The Comrade Commander gently stroked his shoulders as they rose and fell rapidly. A strip of cloth sticking out from a tear made by an enemy bullet on the shoulder of his worn-out fur coat, flapped in the wind. Patting the mark of a bloody battle as if to soothe a wound, Comrade Kum Song said calmly.

"Let's not forget the comrades who fell on the road of the revolution, Comrade Han. Those countless comrades-in-arms and patriots who shed their blood and died cursing the enemy may all be watching us. True, it's not easy to die, but it's no harder than winning the revolution in the face of all trials. If we think of dying rather than of finding a way out of the difficulty, who would avenge our dead comrades and who would attain our people's aspirations? Who would save millions

and millions of workers in all lands who are being harshly exploited and oppressed?

"While listening to your discussions, I was thinking about Comrades O Sang Gwon and Li Dong Chon. Comrade O's fiancée joined our ranks to make revolution. How would Comrade Ok Nyo feel? How would Comrade Dong Chon's mother feel? If you all die here, what would I tell Comrade Ok Nyo? Should I tell her this was the last hardship in the Korean revolution and in future the road ahead would be easy, so she need not worry and carry on the revolution? Have courage, Comrade Han. Didn't we ourselves pledge that we would fight forever for the Korean revolution? If you die, it means my death. So, Comrade Han, if you really worry about the revolution, you must be tough and break through this adversity."

"Comrade Commander!"

Han Hung Su cried out, his face still buried in the Comrade Commander's embrace, sobbing. The snowstorm whirled furiously as if to prevent the two men from breathing. Everything in the universe seemed to hold its breath in fear of the snowstorm now blowing so mercilessly.

"This is a very good snowstorm. It will give us a golden opportunity and may even help us to get out of this hole. If this snowstorm keeps blowing for about three more days, our enemies will freeze to death. Ha, ha, ha...."

Comrade Kum Song laughed, gazing at the shrieking blizzard. Then, with an affectionate pat on the shoulder of Han Hung Su, he told him almost in a whisper.

"Shouldn't we go back, Comrade Han? Our comrades must be waiting for us.... Now let's go back. Let's set their minds at rest and think over the matter. Once we sit down in a warm room our frozen ideas might also melt out."

Han Hung Su raised his head. The very hoarfrost on his fur cap and coat collar was shaking.

"Please forgive me."

Han Hung Su dropped his head again and wiped his tears with the back of his fist. The frozen corners of his eyes smarted. However, he was full of confidence now and walked back with a lively step. Presently the two reached a rise from which they could see the light of the cabin between the branches. Comrade Kum Song said as though to himself.

"Yes, this is not an ordinary situation. It's not going to be easy to get out of this one. It can't be helped. If we can't find

a way, we'll have to resort to the last means. What do you say about it, Comrade Han? But however they try, their rings of encirclement are no match for the barbed wire-entangled prison walls, are they?"

"Well...."

Han Hung Su faltered, not immediately grasping the meaning.

"Then, we might break through. Once I was in prison and people escaped even from there. If there is no other way each of us can make his own way through. It's quite possible. But we needn't think about it. The question is how to maintain our ranks and tide over this crisis."

Han Hung Su felt the strain on his body relaxing all of a sudden. Hearing Comrade Kum Song's words, he felt embarrassed at his tortuous thoughts. He ran ahead, thinking to tell his men of the Comrade Commander's intentions right away. But he missed the path and fell into a drift. At this, Comrade Kum Song laughed out loud. Han Hung Su was completely refreshed and, buried in the snow, burst into a fit of laughter just as he had on the hill behind Fuerhho.

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In the truest sense of the term, one cannot cut oneself off from the world. However hard one tries to turn one's back on the world, it is always there to confront one. In fact, if you think you have done so you are thinking subjectively. Even if you sit crosswise or with your back to society, you can only move about within the confines of the world. Who had ever imagined that such a large number of soldiers would commit brutalities against people, searching every nook and corner in this God-forsaken valley of Laoheishan where deer and hares are not shy of human beings? And this whole clamorous campaign was laid on to harm the less than twenty youths now seated in this log cabin. That really is disillusioning.

Old Ma was deep in thought, poking the fire mechanically with a stick. He had moved about in secluded ravines because he did not enjoy the sight of Japanese soldiers. All he had found was a hare caught in one of his snares set on the edge of a pre-

cipice; it was partly eaten by a wolf. He had put the hare on the charcoal fire but was too preoccupied to keep an eye on it. The leg of the hare smelt of burning fat. However, he squatted on his haunches, brooding over other things, his head on his knees.

"The room is so quiet; the young men must know they are at their wit's end.... However clever and brave they may be, it can't be helped. Those young men have been driven into a tight corner while fighting for our country. How sad...."

Man cannot die as he wishes. This old man had lost his two sons and even his wife. He was still breathing, and there was no sign of his imminent death, living with wild animals and the wind in this remote mountain. He was born in Tongchon, Kangwon Province, but after wandering about the country, he had finally settled here in this place. His eldest son was beheaded by the Japanese during the March First People's Uprising and three months later his wife died of wrath. Then, his second son died from an infectious disease at Hoeryong. He was so depressed that he had hidden himself in the mountains. It was nearly ten years now. Twice a year he was in touch with the outside world when he went to the market some 200 *ri* away taking a few deerskins to buy salt. His only hobby which he could not desist from, was reading books. He would get books every time he went to buy salt and would read them all the winter.

"An old man like me who has led an unworthy life still has many days to live but the lives of these sturdy young men here are in danger.... Thousands of Japs are swarming in the mountains and valleys to destroy a handful of young men. It is outrageous! They say we are facing the end of the world, but you'll hardly find a monstrous state of affairs like this in any history book."

The kitchen door rattled open. A blast of cold wind blew in and the flames in the fireplace swayed to one side. Yet Old Ma was still wrapped in sad thoughts, his head on his knees. There was the tap-tap of shoes and some one entered the room.

"Tonight the Japs won't bustle about, so I have to make sure that these men sleep peacefully. I wish I could give them enough to eat their fill tonight because it may be their last night.... So maybe this valley is no longer a suitable place to live. The Japs say that since they have taken our country, the very bracken on the mountains belongs to them. I'm afraid it is wrong to seek a comfortable life in a place where you won't

see the Japanese. I think I should shorten my life; what's the use of trying hard to live on like this? Even these young people who have such a bright future before them are spending their last night calmly just like that...."

Old Ma felt somebody by his side, but did not look up. The room which had been so quiet was now animated but the old man was not conscious of it. All he could see was the dancing flames.

"Grandpa, something is burning. What is it?"

At Comrade Kum Song's voice Old Ma took the poker he was holding and rolled the scorched leg of hare over.

"I'm roasting a hare's leg. It's quite good with salt. But there's not fat enough to feed many, I'm afraid."

"You needn't feed others. Give me the poker, please. You must rake the fire so as to roast it evenly."

Comrade Kum Song pulled up a seat beside the old man and carefully raked the charcoal fire. Having handed over the poker, Old Ma held out his bony hands to the fire. Though warmed at the fire, his thin, discoloured hands dark as old tree bark seemed to reveal his melancholy heart.

"You only catch this sort of game? I think you can catch plenty of game in this deep snow," he said, putting the hare's leg on the fire and leisurely moving the poker. At last there was a faint smell of roast meat.

"I'm sure some wild animals get caught. But they are taken by the Japs who are jostling around everywhere in the mountains. I went and made a round of all my snares in secluded places to try and find a way out, but the Japs were everywhere I went. This hare remained untouched because I set the snare on the edge of a rugged cliff. Otherwise it wouldn't have been there."

"I'm sorry if we are interfering with your hunting. But they will die here in bunches. This is quite a spectacle for you, isn't it?"

Old Ma raised his face and gazed intently at Comrade Kum Song's gentle smile. Old story books tell about handsome heroes, with eyes like the morning star and ruby lips; maybe the books referred to this sort of man. But however strong he is, how can he be so unconcerned encircled by thousands of enemies, without even batting an eyelid?

"Excuse me, Chief," said Old Ma pleadingly, and moved up closer to him, crossing his knees.

"What can I do for you?"

Rolling the hare's hind leg on the fire, Comrade Kum Song looked calmly into the old man's entreating eyes.

"Don't you have any good tactic? I made a round of every corner of the mountain all day long, and I found that things have become very hard now. I know I'm not supposed to poke my nose into your business concerning the nation; I'm an old man living on this mountainside who turned my back to the world, though I'm witnessing my country being destroyed. However, since I'm seeing you driven into this corner while fighting to deal with our nation's troubles, let me say a word. I still have a spark of patriotism though my life is little different from an animal's. I hope you to understand how I feel and find a way to safety this night. I'm sure the Japs will swarm into the valley tomorrow. Then you won't be able to achieve your heroic goal."

"Thank you, Grandfather. Now your meat is ready. Help yourself; you must be very hungry. We are discussing the matter at present."

"And have you found a solution?"

"Oh, not really. Our enemies are too numerous and we are few, so we must avoid a confrontation until next time."

"Quite right. Old books of military science teach that in advancing or withdrawing you must not defy but comply with reason. And I think it's right for you to comply with reason in the light of the present situation. Once you get out of here, you'll make it to some lonely place where you soldiers can build yourselves up and then return to battle. About 60 *ri* away, beyond a pine forest, there is a lonely ravine, where no man would ever venture. I call it Open Flower Ravine. Once you get in there, you needn't be afraid of enemies, however numerous. All your soldiers look very brave and high-spirited, but they are worn out. If they go to Open Flower Ravine they will be able to recover from their fatigue."

"Open Flower Ravine.... It sounds beautiful. But if it's such a place, we can't get there, can we?" Comrade Kum Song inquired, glancing at the blue eyes of the old man who had something of a recluse about him.

"Of course I could guide you there. But right now the enemies are surrounding you with an iron wall, so it'll be hard to cut your way through."

"But I think we can find a way out. They haven't surrounded this vast mountain completely, have they?"

"You haven't taken a look at it, have you, Chief?" The old man stared aghast at his unaffected countenance and then said with a sigh:

"I've been to every summit and ravine on Laoheishan. If the worst comes to the worst, I checked every corner but the Japs were standing guard wherever you could make a breakthrough."

"Of course, they are guarding those places because it's possible to get through there. If you want to escape, you must choose the spot that is impassable."

"Yes, those well versed in military art have long attached importance to places which ordinary people would never think of using. But our enemies are too numerous here, forming ring after ring, you know."

"Ha, ha, ha. If you can't find a way out, we really are at a dead end. However many they are, they can't surround us just like roadside trees, can they? Even if the sky falls on us, there is a way out, as the saying goes. I think we can find a way. Think it over. As far as I'm concerned, there must be at least one spot where there is no enemy."

"But where?" Old Ma raised his head abruptly, and stared at his ever-smiling face.

"You've just told me, you said there was no enemy, didn't you? Where you picked up this hare?"

"Hum...."

He groaned as if infatuated, nodding his agreement.

"If there is no other way, we must try that place, mustn't we?"

"That's right." Still resting his eyes on his face, the old man replied mechanically, nodding repeatedly. Then, all of a sudden, his blue eyes brightened as he said excitedly:

"Did I say that there was no enemy soldier?... I think I said that I hadn't been close to where they were. Ah, how clever you are! I was actually looking at the way out with my own eyes and did not see it. Yet you did see it, here, in this house 10 *ri* away. Now I have to believe in what they call clairvoyant powers. You are right. There is no enemy on the edge of the cliff. It stands like a wall, about 20 fathoms high, so that even animals can hardly pass. You're right. Once a man makes up

his mind, there is no mountain he can't scale, however steep. You'd better leave tonight; I'll guide you."

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Informed by Han Hung Su of what Comrade Kum Song had said, the guerrillas took it easy and fell asleep, as their bodies frozen all day long by the blizzard became warm.

At midnight Old Ma woke them. Rubbing their eyes, they found the room full of warm steam and they could smell a tasty meal cooking. The old man had produced a big pot of dumplings; he said they must eat their fill before setting out on their long journey. The room was buzzing with conversation.

Everyone ate their fill in high spirits. Then they made themselves combat-ready.

Presently, the unit climbed down the mountainside, through the snow-covered lane. There was a strong wind. It blew hard enough to shake the mountain almost. The snowstorm lashed the forests, broke against the peaks, and whirled up into the air before rushing down.

"This is the best thing that could happen for our walk tonight. The wind will cover our tracks immediately." Old Ma grinned, shielding his face from the wind with his sleeve. As they crossed a small hill, he came to a halt.

"In the daytime this place was littered with small sheets of paper full of foul words. I can't see them now because the wind has blown them away."

Looking round to find the path, he added.

"By the way what do you think has happened to General Kum Song? Those sheets claimed that all the guerrillas have been destroyed...."

"Well...."

Comrade Kum Song smiled but Old Ma was not looking.

"The Japs are the worst devils in the world. They can never be trusted. If they have wiped out the guerrillas as they claim, why have they thrown in such a huge army and surrounded this mountain with ring after ring? Early this winter I went to the market place to get salt, and I heard them say General Kum Song had launched his army to strike at the Japs. They

said Korea would be liberated before long. Because I have a guilty conscience, I'm afraid of appearing in public, but I wish I could meet such a man. Then I wouldn't regret if I died the next day."

"What do you mean you've got a guilty conscience? You must live long and live in a good world."

"How can I hope for personal comforts? I only wish the great man a long life so that he will save our miserable fellow countrymen. Why, the path has been buried in snow. Where the devil am I now?"

Holding up the unit, the old man looked ahead for a while, before he went on.

The cliff came into sight. It was a sheer precipice towering high like a pillar erected in the air. The cliff had walls on three sides, connected with the mountain range at one corner. Comrade Kum Song examined the walls of the rock closely. It was a hundred metres thick. Meanwhile, the unit took a rest. Presently Comrade Kum Song came back to his men and gave them detailed instructions on the forthcoming action; they must not fire unless ordered to do so; they must neither talk nor roll down stones.

At a rough estimate the cliff was about 30 metres high. With a rope round his waist, Kim In Ryong scaled the wall of the cliff. He was agile and good at climbing trees. The wind howled still more violently; it whirled noisily round and round as though to fling the man into the air. Breathless seconds passed. There was the sound of a tree stump ripped off and down tumbled Kim In Ryong. His comrades who had been watching him with bated breath gathered round him. Once again he scaled the rocky wall in silence. Five times he failed but would not give up. His hands were bleeding and his knees were covered with bruises. So was his face. Kwon Man Song offered to do the job but Kim In Ryong pushed him aside and went forward. His ninth attempt succeeded and the rope came down. Blood trickled down from the wounds on his head, but Kim In Ryong did not think of wiping it off; he tied the rope to a rock and pulled it up. All the guerrillas followed, with Old Ma in their wake.

"By Jove, men have done something that even the goats can't do." Chin Il Man the "theoretician" commented as befitting his nickname.

"Do you remember someone once said that where the goats

can go, a man can go and where men can go, troops can go? But that's an outworn formula now. Wherever trees strike their roots and grass grows, we can go, live and fight." Song Dok Hyong retorted.

"At last we've made a breakthrough, Grandfather. Our everlasting thanks," said Comrade Kum Song with fresh emotion, taking the old man's hand.

"Don't you say so. I never imagined a man like me, a recluse, doing something useful for our army. Tonight is the most worthwhile night of my whole life."

Old Ma still had his hands in the Comrade Commander's, his eyes glistening with tears.

By daybreak the unit had cut through the ring of encirclement and covered 60 *ri*. In a pine wood they came across a solitary log cabin. Before making the return journey, Old Ma kindly told Han Hung Su how to manage. The room was small, but it could accommodate the whole group; sometimes the fire did not draw well, so the kitchen door had to be left ajar; there were enough potatoes in the cellar to feed his men for more than a fortnight. In the pine wood, he said, they would be able to catch as many deer and boars as they wanted; and that the roll of wire in the kitchen could be used for snares.

Some time later the old man went to the backyard and brought down a frozen deer.

"This will be enough for one meal. But there isn't much salt; no more than one *doe*. This is a remote mountain and everything is short."

He then added that if they intended to stay here long, he would go to the Lotzukou area to get a couple of *mal* of salt.

The parting of ways was a moving scene, indeed. The old man bade the guerrillas farewell. All of them accompanied him a long way. Comrade Kum Song, holding his hand, went with him for more than five *ri*. With tears in his eyes, Old Ma bowed and said.

"It's no easy task to prop up a leaning house, and you are working to save a declining nation. So your hardships are inevitable. I wish you good health. And if you meet General Kum Song some day, please tell him that an old man who moved into the mountain after the country was ruined and is living his remaining days, sends him best wishes."

Comrade Kum Song held the old man's hands in his for a long time. The old man's tears dropped on his hands and

Comrade Kum Song told him that the homeland would be liberated in the not too distant future, so he must live until then and added that he would meet him then. Now he told Han Hung Su to accompany the old man to where he left the rugged path. On his way the old man repeatedly asked Han to return, pushing him in the back. Han ignored his entreaties. They walked together for ten *ri* or so, and then the old man refused to move. "This road is just as familiar to me as my backyard. So you go back and take good care of your chief." Han Hung Su could do nothing but exchange words of parting with him.

"Forgive me. Were it not for our hard plight, I should have accompanied you home. General Kum Song asked me again and again to convey his apologies to you."

"What did you say? General Kum Song said so?"

"Yes, he did."

"Why, then, you mean he is General Kum Song? Dear me, heaven is merciless."

Old Ma fell down in a heap.

"All my life I've longed to meet a great man. But when I met him, I didn't notice him. I'm a fool. What shall I do?" The old man gave a deep sigh of vexation, striking his chest with his hand and looking up at the sky. Then he sprang to his feet.

"I certainly will meet the General again. When you get back, tell him I'll come and see him whatever happens."

The old man trudged across the virgin snow, obviously with firm determination.

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Meanwhile, the log cabin was in high spirits. They sang, laughed and made a commotion.

Song Dok Hyong, his sleeves rolled up and nagging at Kim Chang Mun, stripped the skin off the deer and cut off its limbs. Chon Gwang Sik chopped the firewood and lit the fire. Kwon Man Song, known for his tenacity, made wire snares, and kept pushing his spectacles up on his slippery nose. He boasted that he would provide each man with three or four deer in the morning. Chin Il Man remained a theoretician as ever. Seated

at a corner of the room, he rummaged in a wooden box full of books belonging to Old Ma. There were a *Confucian Classics*, a handwritten copy of *Chonggamnok, The Tale of Three Kingdoms* and some modern fiction.

Kwon Man Song took Kim In Ryong into the kitchen to put ointment on his head. It was a mixture of pine resin and deer fat. The wounded man would not allow his head to be bandaged, but Kwon Man Song threatened him, saying that he would die if the wounds got frozen and infected. Eventually he succeeded in putting on a thick bandage, so that Kim In Ryong had to take off his cap for the time being.

The cheerful wounded man mimicked the howling of wild animals, and made them all laugh.

In the kitchen they peeled potatoes and ground maize on the stone mill. A deer's legs were sticking out of the open pot in which the boiling water hissed away.

Next morning the soldiers went hunting. Comrade Kum Song went into the forest with them. Several men, led by Kwon Man Song, had gone earlier to set the snares. All the rest, taking their rifles, either lay in wait for game or chased it. Comrade Kum Song preferred seeing his men elated to hunting. He would sit at a corner of the hilltop or walk about to look at his men below.

As soon as the formation moved down the slope, there was a burst of shouting.

"There goes a deer!"

Then, similar shouts were heard from the opposite direction. Mingled with echoes, the shouts raised here and there rang through the ravine. Song Dok Hyong made for the deer. It could not run well, sinking into the snowdrifts. He rushed and fell forward on the snow, catching its hind leg.

"Got it!" he shouted. But it kicked its legs so violently, that he had to let it go. The deer darted helter-skelter across the mountainside.

"Here comes another!"

There was a shout from below: it was Kim In Ryong who could not chase the animal with his head bandaged. They only chased two deer but as they flashed here and there, the chasers were confused into thinking that there were many deer. Then a bear made its appearance at one corner. The near-sighted Kwon Man Song looked ahead, pushing his spectacles up and down on his nose. The black animal moved before his eyes. It

looked much bigger than he had expected. He threw away the snare and, raising his clenched fists, yelled; "Here is another one!" The mountain echoed with his shout.

Not far from where the bear appeared Chin Il Man was struggling with a deer. He wanted to capture the animal which had sunk into the snow, blinking its eyes vacantly. He went about it quietly; he tried to get it at all costs so as to be able to shout hurrah. The snow was waist-deep. As he pushed his way through the snow the deer stood face to face with him, stock-still. Thinking that the animal had dreadfully pitiful eyes, Chin Il Man approached quietly when his prey suddenly struggled. Powdery snow spluttered and stars flashed in his eyes. But he did not let go; he hugged the beast with both arms. "Got it!"

Simultaneously with his shout, there was a volley of gunfire. Kwon Man Song and Kim In Ryong had taken a shot at the bear. However, the animal made a desperate dash for the hilltop. Song Dok Hyong and a dozen or so men who had been chasing the deer tightened the ring of encirclement, shouting all the time. The bear ran in different directions, searching for a quiet place to pass through. Comrade Kum Song who had been standing by a rock suddenly spotted a dark figure. The bear was running straight towards him. He pulled out his pistol and moved up to a fallen tree trunk. As the beast approached he pulled the trigger. The bullet went right through its head. Two other bullets pierced the belly. The bear kept darting forward, blood dripping on the snow. After crossing a ravine it stuck its head into the snow, its limbs jiggling.

As shouts were raised over the captured bear, everyone flocked to the spot. The two deer were tied up. Chin Il Man appeared belatedly, exultantly carrying the prey he had caught alive.

Covered in snow by now they all laughed heartily. Chon Gwang Sik prepared a carrying pole. Song Dok Hyong bound the forelegs and hind legs separately. The pole carried by four persons was made of a log as thick as a rafter flexed in the middle and the bear's back dragged on the snow. The snow-covered forest looked as though it was sprinkled with silvery powder.

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The 18th day of their stay was the last day of the year. The guerrillas had been doing military and political training. Many subjects had been dealt with. How can we characterize this year in the Korean people's national-liberation struggle? What is our immediate task to further develop the anti-Japanese armed struggle? What must be done to build up and protect the liberated areas or guerrilla bases? Everyone expressed his views on these subjects.

After supper Comrade Kum Song suggested they should wind up the discussion today and greet the New Year 1933. He looked round the room. The narrow room was packed to the door. An oil lamp hung on the wall and through the doorway one could see the snow-capped crest of the mountain. There was a hushed silence as they waited for the Comrade Commander to begin. With a broad smile on his face he began to speak. His austere voice rang softly through the room, now wrapped in silence.

"What road have we taken throughout this year of 1932? Without hesitation, we can say that this year has been a most glorious year for us.

"This spring we established the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army, expressing the Korean Communists' resolve to the whole world. Our firm determination that we would wipe out the Japanese imperialist aggressors by force of arms has ushered in a new period in the Korean people's national-liberation struggle.

"From the very moment we formed our ranks at the forest of Antu, calling ourselves the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army, the Korean people have sternly condemned the Japanese imperialist aggressors, and have become a people firmly resolved and possessing the strength to liberate themselves by their own effort. And an independent revolutionary force has emerged to fight a national-liberation struggle in the colony.

"The banner we carry is a signal that the colonial system set up by the imperialist marauders, is disintegrating, it augurs that man will be freed from the great misfortune he has

suffered for centuries—from the suffering caused by colonial oppression.

“This year we set out boldly on a path that no one else has ever trodden. Therefore, we had to face the most difficult ordeals.

“When the first seeds of revolution put forth buds they had to endure harsh winds and frosts. The harsh wind blew without mercy and the frost cracked the ground. But the buds have survived all this, struck root and spread their shoots....”

Comrade Kum Song paused for a moment. The atmosphere was tense; they could hardly hear a single breath. Because of its unboundedly vast and profound meaning, Comrade Kum Song’s speech, though brief, gripped them all. Han Hung Su, Chon Gwang Sik, Kim In Ryong, Kwon Man Song and all the others present in the room had been among the first formation founded at the forest of Antu.

They had never imagined that the troops formed in four lines on that early afternoon of April 25 which had seemed a quite ordinary day would mark the beginning of a great era in history. They only remembered that their keen wish to take up arms had finally been granted, that many more people had gathered than had been expected, that the Comrade Commander’s speech had been inspiring from beginning to end, and that because of this, their hearts were beating loudly. No historic event seems extraordinary when it happens, and this did not seem so either at the time.

The sound of heavy breathing was heard here and there in the room. Han Hung Su felt something strike him hard inside his chest. Hardly able to bear it, he pressed his hands against his chest and turned his head. Chon Gwang Sik and Kwon Man Song who were seated by his side, heaved their shoulders, too.

Looking out at the distant mountain ranges through the wide-open window or gazing at the luxuriant forest, Comrade Kum Song went on, pointing to the importance of each phase of the course his unit had taken that year.

“This was a year of grim trials”—these few words took in many events, indeed. Image after image flowed past in Comrade Kum Song’s mental kaleidoscope: The thorny vines, rocky cliffs, quagmires, feet overrunning everything, Cha Gi Yong’s canvas shoes tied with arrowroot vines, and Choe Chil Song’s dreadful sandals made of hemp-rope as thick as his forefinger. Then came the image of the four-year-old girl at Chonsangdegi tot-

tering up the slope barefooted; the old man in his sick bed; the young soldier of the Independence Army wounded by a Japanese gun; Old Ma, kicked by jackboots, limping along...

"...Since ours was an unexplored path, we probably had to face many more hardships than others.

"Sometimes we may have taken rugged roads when we could have gone a roundabout way or avoided them. But by and large we have walked straight along the course we fixed, have moved far ahead and climbed the summit.

"We have made our influence felt along the Tuman-gang and Amnok-gang Rivers, in countless places in northern Korea, in Hamhung, Wonsan, Chongjin, Unggi and in the coal and ore mines and forested areas.

"Our troops formed at the forest of Antu with the 18 of us gathered here as the core, expanded to Wangching, Yenchi, Holung, Hunchun, to the northern zone where Comrade Li Hyok is, to that far-off place on the Amnok-gang River where Comrade Li Hong Gwang is, and to the western zone. Everywhere we went companies and battalions came into being.

"What is more, vast liberated areas or guerrilla districts have been secured, protected by semi-guerrilla zones. The dense network of our organizations has covered the whole of the country.

"And we have grown so much that we have surprised even ourselves.

"Our comrades who are scattered like shining stars everywhere are doing their work without a hitch.

"The endless line of miners led by Cha Gi Yong, many poor peasants and servants lined up behind Choe Chil Song and Pak Hung Dok, the women who follow Yong Suk and Ok Nyo, and Comrades Li Chol Gun, Li Hyok, Choe Gi Gap and other political workers assigned to every part of the country—they are all growing up, and training, in their turn, the present generation and awakening the workers and peasants.

"In this way the revolution has begun its counterattack on the counterrevolution.

"The enemy is crying out in despair. He has to recognize us.

"During the discussion the other day I was told that you comrades quoted the first paragraph of the *Communist Manifesto*. And I think I may say that the Japanese imperialists are concentrating all their efforts on annihilating us. They clamor-

ously call us guerrillas 'Communists' and 'communist bandits', and in the final analysis, this means that all the rulers and political forces are united against us.

"We can draw two conclusions from this: One, that we have established ourselves firmly even in the enemy's eyes, and two, that he has admitted the fact that we have grown into an invincible force.

"Comrade Han, what did you do with that newspaper? The one that Comrade Se Gol brought."

Han Hung Su asked Chin Il Man about the copy of *Donga-Ibo*. He took a tattered newspaper out of his tunic pocket and spread it on the floor.

"Yes, this is it. *Kum Song's Communist Troops Have Appeared. A Communist District Formed along the Tuman-gang River....*"

The copy of the newspaper reflected the swaying lamplight. More than half the report had been deleted with black ink by the censorship. The editors seemed to have taken the utmost care to play down the type and space, but still it retained its significance as the first report on a new, historic event.

"Read out the report, Comrade Han."

Han Hung Su held the newspaper under the lamplight and read fluently.

"What have you to say about it, comrades? What did we do this year? Must we be so modest as to say that we did nothing, we just trekked through the forests and snow? No. That's not so. At least we must say this: The Korean people were conquered by the Japanese imperialist aggressors years ago and have suffered greatly and, finally, have been confronted with the crisis of national ruin. A tragic history began; deprived of their country, of their homes, many people started wandering, scattering without destination. However, from this year, our people embarked on a revolutionary war to destroy the aggressors. Our history has entered a new phase. That much at least we must say.

"We are no longer just a bud. We have grown into a tree with its first ring. Our roots have pushed deep into the ground, and we have stretched out our branches. Storm and blizzard will continue to hit the tree, but its roots bedded deep into the earth will not budge. The trunk will stand firm. Sometimes, branches may be broken off or leaves torn off, but the tree will

grow up to the sky. Comrades, the time has come. Let's move into the base in the New Year without delay...."

As Comrade Kum Song said this firmly, looking round, the flames of the lamplight fluttered as if giving a start in surprise. Everyone rested his eyes on his face simultaneously. Looking at his comrades' faces overflowing with delight, he smiled in satisfaction. At this moment Han Hung Su felt his eyes warm with tears and he hung his head. As he turned away his face, he saw tears in the eyes of Chon Gwang Sik and Kwon Man Song.

Comrade Kum Song went on speaking, explaining in detail how to carry on their bold activities in the coming year, relying on the base.

The gathering was over, and Comrade Kum Song went out. But Han Hung Su's excited voice still sounded in the room. The moon was shining. The moon shed its bright light over the boughs of the pines covered thickly with snow and over the mountain path disappearing into the forest. The wind whirled the snow up into the sky. The night wore on and the cold was more severe. However, Comrade Kum Song did not feel it, walking through the snow, his hands folded behind. Whenever he was happy or sad or taking a rest, he liked to walk in the forest as he was doing now.

The homeland is seeing out another year, groaning in pain. She is reluctantly greeting the New Year, crouching her bruised body; there was neither temple bell nor dinner party. The night is far ahead in the seashore hovel where the tired ploughman and his family lie asleep, in the hostel where the miners sleep after crawling up and down the pit, black loads on their backs, and in a fire-field tiller's cabin where the whole family are sleeping hungry under the torch in a niche. The last night of the year is flowing over the wooden floor of the prison where the youth destined for the gallows in the morning spends a wakeful night, over a village in the base where posts have been erected on the ruins of a burnt-down house, over the sturdy heels of the guerrillas who are walking along the road in darkness. The flat grassy slope behind Yangji Village must be under snow and the moon must also be shining there. The night must be advancing over the hill and the wind blowing on the elm tree.

Where can Yong Ju be now? What is he thinking and how is he spending this night? Are they spending this night sepa-

rately or is Chol Ju with Yong Ju now to comfort his younger brother on this particular occasion? Even on this last day of the year, the Grandmother at Mangyongdae must, as usual, have come out to the road at twilight, shading her eyes with her hands to see if her son and grandsons are coming home, though she is well aware that she is hoping in vain. "I'll free the country and come home, Grandmother. I wish you, too, good health in the New Year." His heart swelled, when he raised his face. The clear image of her wrinkled face had gone and he saw instead a heavily drooping bough. He had walked deep into the forest. Looking abstractedly at the snow-clad mountaintops and the boughs of trees, he recited a stanza from a song his father used to sing for him.

*Comrade, do you know,
The green pine tree on Namsan Hill
Enduring every hardship under snow and frost
Shall come to life
When spring comes round
With its warm sunshine again?*

The wind was fierce. The whirlwind blowing up from the ravine ran wild as though to blow down the tree. But the thick tree shook its boughs and leaned over only to straighten again. The branches sighed as if they could hardly endure it. The cruel weather tried frenziedly to take the tree's life, mobilizing the frost and wind, indeed all the elements that kill. Yet the roots held solidly in the land and sent up their sap to the trunk, while the sunshine nourished it through bark and leaves. Thus the tree, in the worst weather, was forming another year ring, aiming to grow up into a huge tree. Yes, the annual ring is formed in this severe winter. You can't call it a tree if it has no ring. The year 1932 was passing, drawing a thick line round the homeland, the revolution and this tree and everything.

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Eighteen stood in single file in the forest. As the wind shook the boughs, the powdery snow flew about. Comrade Kum Song

took the first step leading them towards the distant snow-capped ridge. Behind him the file marched vigorously, stamping down the virgin snow, across the hill behind which day was breaking.

Meanwhile, Chon Gwang Sik who had arrived at the Wangching district as an advance party could only find Li Chol Gun when he got to Yaoyingkou. Li Chol Gun's face was sun-tanned. Turning his broad shoulders, he looked at Chon Gwang Sik.

"The battalion is all lined up, Comrade Chon. We should have sent a message to Wangching, shouldn't we?"

"Let's meet headquarters at Yaoyingkou."

The two men went up to the top of a hill where people were gathered to welcome the guests. The battalion stood in columns behind a red banner. And behind the battalion, on either side of the road, were the people holding flags and drums. Walking past the front line of the troops, Li Chol Gun gave some instructions, adjusting their uniforms or posture. On reaching the middle of the line, he halted in front of a rather small soldier.

"You are here too, Comrade Gwang Chon."

"Yes, I've run here with my mother."

"Your mother, too? From such a far-off place...."

"She insisted that she come too, so...."

"Good. Comrade Gwang Chon, you shall meet the General in place of your brother."

Li Chol Gun's eyes met Gwang Chon's and then rested on the rifle slung over his shoulder. Then he recalled Li Dong Chon, Gwang Chon's brother, looking up at the blue sky and holding up the gun.

Three horses were driven out of the village. The first one was a slender grey with a beautiful mane, the second a roan and the third a roan, but a slender strawberry roan.

"Shall we leave now?" Li Chol Gun called back holding the first horse. Chon Gwang Sik who had been giving some instructions to Se Gol, nodded and approached the horses. Pushing back his wooden holster, Li Chol Gun mounted the roan with ease. As he picked up the reins, the horse tossed his head and shook his mane. Quite unconcerned, Li Chol Gun tightened his belt, straightened his cap and looked ahead. Then a guerrilla handed him the reins of the grey. He took them and had just swung his horse round when Chon Gwang Sik rode up alongside on the third horse with the exactly same movement.

"Let's go."

Chon Gwang Sik touched the horse's flanks with his heels, and flicked his neck with the reins. The horse took a leap forward.

Li Chol Gun rode ahead leading the Comrade Commander's grey, and Chon Gwang Sik followed. The snow was kicked up by their hoofs. They were about to skirt a mountain bend when Li Chol Gun turned round. He smiled as he saw the long line of guerrillas and the crowds of people gathered on the hilltop, and cast a meaningful look at Chon Gwang Sik and, then, sitting up, spurred on his horse.

The horses cantered off round the mountainside and in a few moments had receded and vanished from sight in the east.

About this time Han Hung Su, under the Comrade Commander's direction, was leaving the forest and heading for the flatland. Then they had to cross a small hill, the last on the way to Yaoyingkou. A furious wind was blowing, covering everyone with so much snow that it was hardly possible to tell one from the other. As Han Hung Su looked back, Chin Il Man was shouting at the rear, mopping his face with the sleeve.

"Hurry up! We haven't got far to go now."

Mumbling voices were wafted on the wind from behind.

When the sun hung over the western mountains, the unit at last reached the hill behind Yaoyingkou. At a corner of the hilltop Comrade Kum Song, shading his eyes with his hand, looked towards Yaoyingkou where the mountain range stretched out. The hills were not so rugged, and they were scattered over a plain blanketed in snow.

"Comrade Han, is anyone up there now?" the Comrade Commander asked taking off his snow-covered fur cap and pointing to the windy plain.

"Comrade Li Chol Gun is taking care of this place too."

"I think he must be at Wangching at this moment."

"Comrade Chon knew about it."

"This is a nice place. I like it very much."

Brushing back a lock of hair from his sweaty brow, Comrade Kum Song looked round, his arms akimbo. A slight smile flashed across his face; he was overjoyed. His gaze wandered over the endless mountain ranges, fields and the winter sky at eventide and he retraced the course he had taken last year. The first step taken at Fuerhho had soon led to the foundation of the Anti-Japanese Guerrilla Army on April 25. As they had foreseen at Small Plot, the year had been indescribably severe and hard. But they had gritted their teeth and endured it. They had had

to face hurricanes and steer through dangerous shallows. Again and again the boat had vanished into the troughs between the gigantic waves only to reappear and finally reach its destination for the year.

"How do you feel, Comrade Han?" he asked Han Hung Su turning round abruptly.

Stepping forward with a smile, Han Hung Su replied: "I'm fine."

"You must be. Really fine. Look! The sky is grey and the earth is covered in snow. Over there the bleak sky and the rough earth meet. Last year we left proud footprints on that land. Those footprints were precious; they were soaked in blood.

"What do you think will happen there this year?"

"Comrade Commander."

Han Hung Su took another step forward, his eyes shining.

"I think our nation's 'Heroic Epic' will be recorded."

"Indeed. We will face still greater hardships but we will leave footprints that are even more glorious."

With these words, he turned a little as the sun glowed in the west. White silvery shafts broke through the sombre grey sky, and soon turned to gold and then to crimson. Comrade Kum Song straightened himself. Again there was a smile on his lips. Han Hung Su, beside him, was still feeling solemn and sublime. He looked at the Comrade Commander, and saw, as always, his faith in the future, in ultimate victory. To be a soldier and follow such a leader was the reason for living, the meaning of life. The year 1932 had seen the revolution grow stronger, the ranks thicken and his comrades develop beyond recognition. Bases were set up and each of the enemy's schemes frustrated. All these things were good, thrilling. Moreover, he felt delighted, happy too, that he had lived a year accompanying his leader as his soldier, and proud to have protected him, learned from him and been able to dedicate whatever he had in him to do his will, and under his guidance had devoted his whole manhood to the revolution, to the great task of national liberation.

The smile faded and the Comrade Commander looked serious. Maybe he was thinking of the course for the New Year of 1933, maybe of Cha Gi Yong, Pak Hung Dok, Li Hyok and the many other comrades who were now in far-off places. Or maybe of Comrades O Sang Gwon and Li Dong Chon who were no longer with him.

At this moment Han Hung Su suddenly thought of Mother

Kang Ban Sok whom he would never meet again. As he felt the tension of rising tears, he heard Chin Il Man call out.

"There are horses coming!"

Raising his head, Han Hung Su looked at the foot of the opposite mountain and recognized Li Chol Gun and Chon Gwang Sik on horseback.

"Put up the red banner."

Han Hung Su's voice resounded in the cold air and echoed over the mountaintop. He pulled out his pistol and gave the signal. A sharp report reverberated through the snowstorm.

The galloping horses came to a sudden halt and the riders gave an answering signal.

Li Chol Gun reined in his horse, and looked at the mountain, where he could see a row of dark figures with a red banner at the head, fluttering in the breeze. The red banner was descending step by step, scintillating against the sunset glow. Li Chol Gun loosened the reins and let the grey go while spurring on his own. The grey reared up on its hind legs and leapt forward towards the red banner, with Li Chol Gun and Chon Gwang Sik close behind.

The icy wind was still blowing. It shook the boughs and showered the men's faces with snow, yet it carried the first scent of spring.

Mounting the white horse, Comrade Kum Song rode ahead through the snowstorm towards Yaoyingkou.

As the unit moved to the hilltop the people greeted them with loud cheers. The other horses had fallen in behind the grey and as they reached the crowd, Comrade Kum Song dismounted.

A mother hurried through the crowd.

"Who is she?"

"She is Comrade Li Dong Chon's mother."

"Comrade Dong Chon's mother?..."

Hands outstretched, he ran towards the woman who was dressed in white.

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